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WILHELM MEISTER'S
APPRENTICESHIP

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VOL. I.

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WILHELM MEISTER'S
APPRENTICESHIP.

BY

GOETHE.

FROM THE GERMAN

BY

ELEANOR GROVE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG 1873

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ.

LONDON: SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, LOW & SEARLE.
CROWN BUILDINGS, 188, FLEET STREET.

PARIS: C. REINWALD & C^{ie}, 15, RUE DES SAINTS PÈRES.

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WILHELM MEISTER'S APPRENTICESHIP.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

THE play lasted very long, and old Barbara went again and again to the window to listen for the sound of carriages. Her beautiful mistress, Mariana, in the character of a young officer, had been enchanting the public that night in the farce, and the old woman was waiting for her with greater impatience than when, as was usually the case, she had only a frugal supper to put on the table. For to-night there was a surprise awaiting her—a parcel by post, from a rich young tradesman named Norberg, as a proof that he was thinking of her he loved, though far away.

Barbara, in her manifold capacity of old servant, confidante, adviser, negotiator of affairs, and housekeeper, had the right of breaking seals; and in this instance her curiosity had been more difficult to restrain than usual, because the good opinion of the liberal lover was even more important to herself than to Mariana. To her great delight, the parcel contained not only a piece of fine muslin and the newest ribbons for Mariana, but also a piece of print, some neck-handkerchiefs, and a little of money for herself. Her heart was filled with gr

and affection for the absent Norberg. She eagerly determined to speak his praises to Mariana, and remind her of what she owed him, and what he must naturally hope and expect from her faithful love.

The piece of white muslin, lighted up by the colours of the half-unrolled ribbons, lay on the little table like a Christmas present, the candles were so placed as to add brilliancy to the gift, and everything was just arranged in the best order, when the old woman heard Mariana's step on the stairs. She ran to meet her, but started back in wonder at seeing the girlish officer push by without noticing her caresses, enter the room with a haste and agitation very unusual, throw her little plumed hat and sword on the table, and begin to pace up and down restlessly, without bestowing one glance on the festive lights.

"What's the matter, darling?" cried the astonished old woman. "For Heaven's sake, child, what has happened? Look at these presents! Who else could have sent them but your tenderest, kindest friend? Of course, 'tis Norberg; he has sent you this piece of muslin for a night-dress, and he's coming himself soon. He seems fonder of you and more generous than ever." The old woman was then going to produce her own presents, but Mariana turned away from the sight, exclaiming passionately:

"Go away, leave me; I won't hear anything about all this to-night. I did what you wished; matters must rest as they are, and when Norberg comes back I will be his, yours—you shall do what you like with me; but till then I am, and will be, my own. Yes; and if you had a thousand tongues, you should not persuade me out of my determination to give myself entirely to the man who really loves me and whom I love. Let me

• have no black looks; I shall give way to this passion as if it were to last for ever."

The old woman remonstrated, reasoned, and at last grew so violent and bitter in the dispute that Mariana flew upon her and seized her by the throat, at which old Barbara burst into a loud laugh, exclaiming:

"I see we must lose no time in getting her into petticoats again, or my life will be in danger. There, go and undress. The young scapegrace has hurt me, but I hope the girl will beg pardon for his bad behaviour. Pull off the coat and all the rest of it; it's an uncomfortable dress, and for you, I see, somewhat dangerous besides. The epaulettes really give you too much courage."

So saying, the old woman was beginning to undress her; but Mariana wrenched herself away, crying, "Not so fast; I am expecting a visitor to-night."

"That's a pity," answered the other. "At all events, I hope it's not that soft, green young fellow, the merchant's son?"

"The very same," said Mariana.

"Well," answered the old woman, derisively, "it really seems as if your ruling passion would soon be generosity—you take such a fancy for those who are under age, and have got no money. It must be delightful to be adored as a disinterested benefactress."

"Laugh as much as you like. I love him; and these mere words, as I say them now for the first time, fill me with ecstasy. I love him! I had no idea what this feeling was before, often as I have acted it. I will throw myself on his neck; I will hold him fast, as if for eternity. He shall see all my love, and I will enjoy his to its utmost extent."

"Come, come," said old Barbara, coolly, "you must

moderate these transports a little. I've just one word to say on the matter that will be some interruption to your joy. Norberg is coming; he will be here in a fortnight: and here is his letter—it came with the presents.”

“Well, and if even to-morrow's sun were to rob me of my friend, I would determine not to know it. Fourteen days!—why, it's an eternity. And what may not happen in a fortnight? Everything may have altered by that time.”

At this moment Wilhelm came in. She rushed to meet him, and we need not say how rapturously he threw his arms round the scarlet uniform, and pressed the little white satin waistcoat to his heart. Who will venture, or feel that he has fitting words at command, to describe the happiness of two lovers? The old woman departed grumbling; we will follow her example, and leave this happy pair alone.

CHAPTER II.

THE next day, when Wilhelm said good-morning to his mother, she told him that his father was very much annoyed by his daily visits to the theatre, and meant soon to forbid them.

“I like to go occasionally myself,” she continued; “but your immoderate love of the theatre disturbs our domestic peace so much, that I am tempted to wish it anywhere. Your father is always asking, ‘What can be the use of it? how can people waste their time so?’”

“Yes,” answered Wilhelm, “he has said the same to me already, and perhaps I answered him too hastily; but, for Heaven's sake, mother, are we to call everything useless except just what puts money into our pockets, or

places us in immediate possession of something? Was not the old house quite large enough for us? Was there any need to build a new one? Does not my father spend a large share of his profits every year in ornamenting our rooms? Are not all these silk hangings and this English furniture useless too? Could not we be satisfied with inferior articles? For my own part, I must confess that these striped walls, with their everlastingly repeated flowers, flourishes, baskets, and figures, make a thoroughly unpleasant impression on me. At the best, they are only like the curtain at our theatre. But what a different feeling it is to be sitting before that! However long we have to wait, we know that at last it will rise, and our minds will be amused, instructed, and elevated by the most delightful and varied objects."

"But don't push the matter to excess," said his mother. "Your father likes to be amused of an evening, too. Besides, he thinks it takes your thoughts from other things; and then, when he is vexed all the blame falls on me. I am constantly reproached about that tiresome puppet-show which I gave you twelve years ago at Christmas, and which first gave you a taste for the theatre."

"Oh! don't abuse the puppet-show, mother; don't repent of your love and care for us. Why, those were my first happy moments in the new, empty house. I see it all clearly before me now. How astonished I was when, after we had received our presents, we were told to sit down before the door leading into the next room! This door opened, but, instead of being, as usual, a way for us to run backwards and forwards from room to room, the entrance was unexpectedly filled up with a grand spectacle. A porch had been raised inside; before it hung a mysterious curtain. At first we all remained at

a respectful distance; and when our curiosity to find out what was glittering and rattling behind this half-transparent veil grew too evident, we were told to sit down on our little chairs, and wait patiently.

"In perfect silence we obeyed. A signal whistle was heard, the curtain rolled up, and we beheld the inside of the Temple in Jerusalem, painted bright red. First we saw the high-priest, Samuel, in conversation with Jonathan: their odd voices as they changed appeared to me worthy of all reverence. Soon after Saul came on, and his perplexity at the impertinence of the ponderous warrior who had challenged him and his people was so great, that I felt immensely relieved when the little dwarf-like son of Jesse came skipping forward, with his shepherd's crook, wallet, and sling, and said: 'All-powerful king and sovereign lord! let no man's courage fail because of him. If your Majesty will allow me, I will go and fight this mighty giant.'

"The first act was over; the spectators were very curious to see what was coming, and longed for the music to stop. At last the curtain rose once more. David devoted the flesh of the monster to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field; the Philistine defied him, stamping violently with both feet, and at last ended the whole affair delightfully by falling like a log. Then the virgins sang: 'Saul hath slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands:' the head of the giant was borne in triumph before the little conquering hero, and the beautiful princess was given him to wife. But here my pleasure was greatly diminished by his dwarfish appearance; too much pains had been taken to make the huge Goliath and the little David thoroughly in character.

"By-the-bye, mother, what has become of those puppets? I was telling a friend about this play of ours the

other day, and it amused him so much that I promised to show them to him."

"I am not surprised at your recollecting it all so clearly," said his mother, "for you were very much interested in it at the time. I remember your stealing the little book, and learning the whole piece by heart. I did not find it out until one evening when you moulded a David and Goliath in wax, and, after making them declaim against one another, gave the giant a thrust, and stuck his misshapen head, on the point of a long pin with a wax head, into the hand of little David. I was so delighted at your good memory, and the feeling way in which you gave the speeches, that I determined at once to give you all the little wooden actors, little thinking how many hours of annoyance this resolution would cause me."

"Don't regret it, mother," answered Wilhelm, "for it gave us children many happy ones."

So saying, he begged for the keys, ran and found the dolls, and seemed for a moment carried back to the times when he had fancied them alive, and fancied, too, that the life had been given to them by the movements of his own hands and the tones of his own voice. He took them to his room, and put them carefully away.

CHAPTER III.

I HEAR it everywhere maintained that first love, whether it come sooner or later in a man's life, is the most perfectly beautiful feeling his heart can ever know. If this be really so, we must look upon our hero as especially favoured in being permitted to enjoy this delicious period in the entire fulness of its rapture. It is

only the few who are thus favoured: the first love of the many leads them through a hard school, in which, after a miserably scanty enjoyment of love's pleasure, they are forced to renounce their highest wishes and learn to bear being deprived for ever of what had once hovered before them as the perfection of happiness.

Wilhelm's imagination had raised his admiration and longing for this fascinating girl to its present height. A short acquaintance had sufficed to win her affection, and now he found himself really the owner of the being he loved so entirely, and not only loved, but respected; for, as she had appeared to him first in the favourable light of a theatrical representation, his passion for the theatre was closely bound up with this, his first love for a woman. His youth endowed him with its usual rich power of enjoyment, and this, in his case, was heightened and kept up by a poetical turn of mind. Mariana's circumstances, too, gave a tone to her behaviour which contributed to increase his love. The fear lest her former connexions should come to the knowledge of her lover lent her an appearance of anxious bashfulness which was most agreeable. Her love for him was passionate and eager, even her disquietude seemed to add to her tenderness, and when with him she was the loveliest of creatures.

On coming to himself after the first intoxication of his great joy, and looking back on his former life, he seemed to see everything in a new light. His duties seemed more sacred, his fancies and likings more vivid, his knowledge clearer, his capabilities more vigorous, and his purposes more resolute. It was, therefore, not difficult for him to discover a plan by which he could avoid his father's reproaches, calm his mother, and at the same time enjoy Mariana's love unmolested. He performed

the business of the day punctually, went very seldom to the theatre, made himself entertaining at table in the evening, and then, when every one was asleep, slipped softly through the garden, wrapped in his cloak, and hurried to his beloved one, at heart a very Leander.

“What have you got there?” asked Mariana, one evening, as he produced a bundle, on which old Barbara’s eyes fixed at once, in the hope of its containing some agreeable presents.

“You will never guess,” answered Wilhelm, as he untied the cloth, and brought out—to Mariana’s astonishment and Barbara’s great disgust—a confused heap of little dolls. When he began carefully to untwist the wires, and exhibit the little figures one by one, Mariane was amused, and laughed heartily, but the old woman turned away annoyed.

A mere trifle is enough to amuse two lovers, and our friends passed a most entertaining evening. The little troupe was examined—each separate figure scanned and laughed over. Mariana would not admire King Saul, in his black velvet robe and crown; she said he looked so stiff and pedantic. The beardless Jonathan, on the other hand, in a red and yellow robe and turban, quite took her fancy; she soon learnt to move him on his wire with much dexterity, and make him perform low obeisances and utter declarations of love. She paid no attention to the prophet Samuel, notwithstanding Wilhelm’s praises of his little breastplate, and explanations that the watered silk of his garment had been part of one of his own grandmother’s old dresses. David was too short, and Goliah too tall, to please her; she held fast by her Jonathan. Indeed, she managed him so prettily, and understood so well how to transfer her caresses from the

doll to our friend, that this trifling play was the introduction to some happy hours.

They were roused from their tender dreams by a noise in the street. Mariana called to the old woman, who was busy, as usual, in altering the stage dresses to suit the next piece that was to be given. She said it was only a party of merry fellows coming away from the Italian tavern next door, after a good supper of fresh oysters just arrived, and plenty of champagne.

"What a pity!" answered Mariana. "We might have made merry too, if we had only thought of it in time."

"I dare say it's not too late yet," said Wilhelm, and slipped a louis d'or into old Barbara's hand, saying: "Bring us what we want, and you shall enjoy it with us."

The old woman went to work briskly, and before long a prettily laid-out table and a good supper stood before the lovers. They made her sit down with them, and the little party ate, drank, and were merry.

At such times there is no want of conversation. Mariana took up her little Jonathan again, and the old woman chose Wilhelm's favourite subject.

"You told us once," she began, "about the first puppet-play that was given on Christmas-eve. It was very amusing, but you were interrupted just as the ballet was going to begin. Now, we've made the acquaintance of the splendid performers who produced such a tremendous sensation."

"Yes," said Mariana, "do tell us the rest, and how you felt about it."

"It is a very pleasant feeling, dear Mariana," replied Wilhelm, "to call back recollections of old times and harmless mistakes which we fell into, more especially if this recollection comes to us just at the moment of reaching some fortunate height, from which we can

look down on the path that lies behind us. It is so very agreeable and satisfactory to see obstacles removed which we once fancied insurmountable, and to compare our present point of development with the undeveloped condition of former days. But my own happiness now is greater than I can describe; for I am not only able to talk over the past with you, but at the same time to look forward into a lovely country, through which we shall wander together, hand in hand."

Here old Barbara interrupted him.

"Well," she said, "how did the ballet go off? I am afraid something must have gone wrong."

"Oh, no," said Wilhelm; "it went off very well, and I have still a confused remembrance of the comical capers and jumps of the negroes and negresses, shepherds and shepherdesses, and the little dwarfs, male and female. After this the curtain fell, the door was shut upon us, and our little party ran off to bed as if they were half intoxicated. But I remember that I could not go to sleep; I wanted them to tell me something more, asked a great many questions, and would not let the nurse who put us to bed go out of the room. The next morning, alas, the magic erection was gone, the mysterious veil had been carried away, we could go through that very door from one room into the other, and not a trace remained of all the adventures that had happened there. My sisters and brothers ran about with their toys, but I crept softly up and down the room—it seemed so impossible that two bare door-posts only should be standing on that magic scene of yesterday. Oh, even the man who is seeking his lost love can hardly be more miserable than I fancied myself."

The look of intense joy that he threw on Mariana

as he said this convinced her that he had no fear of ever being in that sad case himself.

CHAPTER IV.

"FROM that time," continued Wilhelm, "my greatest wish was to see this piece again. I begged my mother to have it performed, and she took advantage of a favourable opportunity to try and persuade my father, but all to no purpose. It was his opinion that, to be really worth anything, pleasures must be of rare occurrence, and that neither old nor young know how to appreciate what they can enjoy every day.

"We should have had to wait very long—possibly until Christmas came round again—if the builder and secret manager of the little theatre had not himself wished to repeat the performance, in order to produce in the farce a new Harlequin which he had just constructed.

"He was a young officer in the artillery, with plenty of talent and a great turn for mechanics. He had been of essential service to my father during the building of our house, and had received so many handsome presents from him that, in return, he wished to prove his gratitude by making his patron's children a Christmas present of this complete little theatre, which he had put together, carved, and painted in his leisure hours. He it was, with the help of a man-servant, who had moved the puppets, and had disguised his voice to recite their different parts. He found no great difficulty in persuading my father to yield to a friend from courtesy what he had refused his children from conviction; and so the theatre was put up once more, and the piece repeated.

“The first time I saw it, wonder and astonishment at the sight of something so new had made me happy;—now, the pleasure consisted in trying to find out *how* everything was done. How could it all be managed, was the great question. I had made up my mind the first time that the dolls did not really speak, and I suspected that they did not move of themselves; but, then, how was it that all looked so pretty, and seemed as if they really spoke and moved? where could the people and the lights be? These questions disturbed me all the more, because, much as I enjoyed the enchantment of the scene, I longed to be one of the enchanters: to have a hidden hand in the game, and yet to be a spectator and enjoy the illusion.

“The piece was over, and preparations were being made for the farce; the spectators had left their seats, and were talking to one another. I pushed closer to the door, and could hear by the rattling within that they were busy putting things away. A carpet hung before the framework beneath the stage; I lifted a corner, and peeped through. My mother noticed it, and pulled me back; but I had had time to see that friends and enemies, Saul and Goliath, or whatever their names might be, were all being laid in one drawer. This was fresh food for my curiosity; and, besides, I had perceived the lieutenant busily at work in the inner sanctum. From that moment Harlequin totally failed to interest me, let him kick his heels together as hard as he would. I was lost in thought: my discoveries made me feel at once more and yet less restless than before. It seemed to me, now that I had really seen something, as if I knew nothing; and there I was quite right, for I could trace no connection between the parts of my knowledge, which is, after all, the main point.”

CHAPTER V.

"IN well-arranged and orderly houses," continued Wilhelm, "the children have a feeling something like what we may suppose rats and mice to have: they spy out all the holes and crannies where a forbidden dainty may be got at, and eat it with a stealthy, timid enjoyment which forms great part of a child's happiness.

"I was sharper than any of the others at noticing when a key had been left in the lock. Sometimes the negligence of those who had rule over our domestic affairs gave me a lucky moment, and my eagerness in turning it to good account was fully proportioned to the veneration I felt for those closed doors, which I was forced to pass for weeks and months, without the chance of getting more than a stolen glimpse within if my mother happened to want something out of the sacred enclosures to which they led.

"Of course the store-closet door was the one I watched most eagerly, and there are few pleasures of anticipation in life which can compare with my delight when my mother called me, as she sometimes did, to help her in carrying something out, and, either by her kindness or my own cunning, I could secure a few dried plums. The abundance of such treasures, lying heaped up one upon another, seemed to my imagination most enchanting, and even the strange fragrance produced by so many different spices together took such an effect on my senses that, if there was a chance of the door being opened, I never failed to revel in the delicious scent that escaped. One Sunday morning my mother had been surprised sooner than she expected by the church-bells, and forgot this key of keys. When the whole house lay

in Sabbath stillness, there it was, in the store-closet door! The moment I saw it, I walked up and down by the wall a few times very softly, then drew closer on tiptoe, opened the door, and found myself in the midst of all that long-wished-for bliss. My eyes ran quickly over the various chests, boxes, jars, and glasses, in some doubt as to what I should choose and take; but I was not very hard to please, and, beside the favourite prunes and a few dried apples, contented myself with one piece of candied orange-peel. As I was quietly slipping away with this booty, I caught sight of some boxes standing together. The sliding lid of one had not been properly closed, and some wires with little hooks attached to their ends were hanging out. A happy idea seized me; I pounced upon them, and what was my rapture to find it justified by seeing my whole world of heroes and happiness lying packed up inside! I meant to take out the topmost ones, look at them first, and then draw out those that lay beneath, but the thin wires soon became entangled. This made me frightened and uneasy, especially as I could hear the cook beginning to move in the kitchen close by; so I thrust them all back into the box, pushed the lid to, and stole softly upstairs into an attic, taking with me only a little manuscript book which had lain at the top, and contained the little drama of David and Goliath.

“From that time forward all the solitary hours I could possibly steal for myself were devoted to the reading of my play, to learning it by heart, and fancying how delightful it would be to have the little figures belonging to it, and put life into them by the movements of my own hands. I thought of this so much that at last I became David and Goliath myself. There was not a corner of the attics, stables, or garden in which I did not

study the piece, trying to make myself perfect master of it, to understand the different parts, and learn them by heart; but I generally put myself in the place of the chief heroes, letting the others run on in my memory like satellites. Thus, for instance, David's grand challenge to the boastful giant was never out of my thoughts, day or night. At times I repeated it to myself half aloud; but no one paid any attention, except sometimes my father, who, on hearing such ejaculations, remarked to himself that his boy must have a famous memory to recollect so much of a thing he had so seldom heard. This gave me so much courage that one evening, as I was busy fashioning little actors out of some lumps of wax, I repeated nearly the whole piece in my mother's hearing. She noticed it, urged me, and I confessed. Fortunately this discovery happened just as the lieutenant himself had been asking to be allowed to initiate me into the mysteries. My mother told him of my unexpected talent, and he managed so to arrange matters that two rooms which were generally empty in the upper story were given up to us, one to be devoted to the audience and the other to the actors, while the opening for the door served, as before, for the proscenium. All this my father allowed his friend to arrange, pretending himself to know very little about the matter, on the principle that if you let children see how much you love them they will become encroaching. It was his opinion that a grave face should be shown, and the children's sports sometimes spoilt, in order to keep them from becoming arrogant and overbearing."

CHAPTER VI.

"THE lieutenant now put up his theatre, and made his arrangements. I noticed that he often came during that week at unusual times, and my curiosity rose incredibly, for I guessed the cause of his visits, and felt sure that I should not be allowed to take any share in what was going on before Saturday. At last the wished-for day arrived; at five in the afternoon my guide came, and took me upstairs with him. I went into the room trembling for joy, and beheld at once, on entering, the puppets hanging on each side of the framework in the order in which they were to appear. After examining them carefully, I climbed on to a step so raised above the theatre that I hovered, as it were, over the little world beneath; and it was not without awe that I gazed down between those little boards; thought of the wonderfully glorious effect it had produced on me as a spectator, and remembered that this was the great secret into which I was going to be initiated. We made a trial which succeeded very fairly.

"The next day a children's party was invited, and we bore ourselves bravely, with the single exception that in the heat of action I let my Jonathan drop, and was obliged to put my hand through to pick him up. This accident disturbed the illusion seriously, caused a loud burst of laughter, and stung me to the quick. The blunder, too, seemed so welcome to my father. He was too prudent to show the pleasure he really felt in his little son's talent, and, when the piece was over, fixed at once on the mistakes, saying that it really would have been very pretty if this or that had not turned out a failure.

"This cut me to the heart, and saddened the whole of that evening; but the next morning I found I had quite slept off my annoyance, and felt very happy in the thought that, but for that one blunder, I had played splendidly. Added to this was the approval of the spectators, who all maintained that, though the lieutenant managed the change of voice from deep to high very well, he was, on the whole, too stiff and affected in his style of declamation; whereas the new beginner had given his Jonathan and David in first-rate style. My mother especially praised the frank, ingenuous tone in which I had challenged Goliath, and presented myself as a modest victor before the king.

"After this, to my great delight, the theatre was left standing, and as spring had come, and fires were no longer necessary, I spent all my play-hours and free time in the upstairs room, practising my dolls famously in all kinds of performances. I often asked my brothers and sisters and my playfellows to come up with me; but, if they did not care to come, I still went alone. Over this little world my imagination brooded till it took another form.

"The first piece, for which expressly both theatre and actors had been created, and which had dictated their form, gave me no pleasure after I had performed it two or three times; but the *Deutsche Schaubühne*,* and some Italian operas with German translations appended, falling into my hands among my grandfather's old books, at the time absorbed all my thoughts, and I began to give them with my puppets. The only preliminary necessary for each performance seemed to me to distribute the characters. Thus, Saul in his black velvet robe had to

* The *German stage*: the title of a book or periodical published in Goethe's time.

act the parts of Chaumigrem, Cato, and Darius; and I must not forget to say that I never gave the whole piece, but generally chose only the fifth act where the stabbing and murder began.

"It was quite natural, too, that the operas, with their manifold changes and adventures, should take my fancy more than anything else. Stormy seas, gods descending from on high, and, above all, thunder and lightning, which were my especial delight, came to pass in them. I set to work with cardboard, colours, and paper, succeeded in making night to great perfection and lightning which was terrific to behold: the thunder would not always succeed, but that was no very serious matter after all. In the operas, too, I had a better opportunity of turning my David and Goliah to account, with whom I could do nothing in the regular drama. Every day I grew to love the narrow space where I enjoyed such delightful hours more and more, but I ought to confess that the good odours brought by the puppets from the store-closet had their full share in this love.

"I had always been clever in using compasses, cutting out figures in cardboard, and colouring pictures, and this stood me now in such good stead that my theatre decorations were soon in tolerable perfection. But this only added to my distress that the deficiencies of my little actors so often prevented me from giving more important pieces.

"As I saw my sisters dressing and undressing their dolls, the thought struck me that I might as well furnish my little heroes with dresses that could be taken off and on. We took off their little pieces and patches, put them together again as decently as we could, saved a little money to buy tinsel and ribbon, and begged many a bit of silk, so that by degrees a theatre wardrobe was

furnished, and one in which the ladies' hoops had by no means been forgotten.

"The little company being now provided with costumes for the most important pieces, one would have fancied that the performances would succeed one another with the greatest rapidity. But no; I was like other children,—they often make great plans, and prepare diligently to carry them out, but the whole matter ends with a few trials, and the preparations are left lying where they were. I confess that this was one of my faults. My great delight lay in the invention of a thing and the exercise of my fancy. For the sake of one scene which pleased me in a play, I had new dresses made, and in this way the whole original wardrobe of my heroes fell into such disorder, and was so mislaid, that I could not even perform the first great piece. I had given way to my fancy, planned, prepared, and rehearsed, not perceiving that in building these thousands of castles in the air I was destroying the very foundations of my original little edifice."

While Wilhelm was telling this story Mariana had been obliged to summon up all her kind feelings for him, in order to hide her drowsiness. The tale, though amusing enough from one point of view, was in reality too simple for her taste, and Wilhelm's comments too grave to suit her. She sometimes trod tenderly on his foot, and gave him outward signs of attention and approval; she drank out of his glass, and Wilhelm was convinced that not a word of his story had escaped her. After a short pause he said:

"Now, Mariana, it is your turn to tell me what pleased you first when you were a child. The present has filled our thoughts so entirely hitherto that we have had no time to think of each other's past way of life. Tell me

how you were brought up. What were the first vivid impressions that you remember?"

These questions would have embarrassed Mariana sadly if old Barbara had not come at once to her help.

"Do you think," said the crafty old woman, "that we noticed everything that happened to us in our childhood so attentively as to have such pretty stories to tell? or that, if we had, we could tell them so cleverly?"

"As if that would be necessary!" exclaimed Wilhelm. "I am so fond of this sweet, kind, lovely creature that every moment of my life which has been spent without her is a source of vexation to me. Let me share your past life at least in imagination. Tell me everything. I will do the same to you, and we will try to deceive ourselves, and win back the time that has been lost to our love."

"Well," said the old woman, "if you are so determined, I dare say that we shall be able to satisfy you; but tell us first about your own increasing fondness for the theatre—how you practised and improved so much as now to be reckoned a good actor. I am sure there must have been plenty of gay doings by the way. It's not worth while to go to bed. I've another bottle in reserve, and who knows how long it may be before we are sitting so comfortably together again?"

Wilhelm did not see Mariana's doleful look at this proposal, and went on with his story.

CHAPTER VII.

"As the number of my playfellows grew larger, these quiet, solitary amusements were interfered with. I had to be sportsman, trooper, or foot-soldier by turns, just as our games happened to be; and in these I had always

some little advantage over the others, because I was able to provide suitable equipments for them. The swords, for instance, were generally turned out of my little manufactory, the decorations and gilding on the sledges were my work, and some secret instinct gave me no rest until I had fashioned all our military equipments on antique models. Helmets with paper plumes, shields, and even coats of mail were constructed, in the fabrication of which many a needle was broken by the seamstresses in the house or any of the men-servants who chanced to have a notion of tailoring.

“Some of my playfellows were now equipped in good style; by degrees we provided arms and accoutrements for the rest, though of a somewhat inferior quality, and altogether we presented quite an imposing little army. We marched about the courtyards and gardens, and many a hard blow was given and taken both on our shields and heads. Sometimes, indeed, disagreements arose, but they soon passed over.

“My playfellows were delighted with these games, but they soon ceased to satisfy me. I had been reading old romances, and the sight of our troop of armed figures of course roused all the ideas about chivalry and knight-errantry with which my head had been filled so long.

“Koppen's translation of ‘Jerusalem Delivered’ came in my way, and at last gave these wandering fancies a settled direction. I could not read the whole of the poem, it is true; but I knew parts of it by heart, and the scenes in them hovered round me like pictures. I was especially fascinated by Clorinda; what she did and what she left undone were alike captivating. Her masculine womanliness, the calm perfection of her whole being, had more effect on a mind just beginning to develope

than the made-up charms of Armida, much as I might appreciate her garden.

"Hundreds of times, while pacing backwards and forwards on the balcony that ran between the gables of our house, looking across the country—as a faint and trembling reflection streamed up from the departed sun, whilst star after star came out above, night advanced out of every corner and hollow, and the solemn silence was only broken by the cricket's shrill chirp—I have repeated aloud to myself the sad story of the duel between Tancred and Clorinda.

"Of course, in common fairness, I took the side of the Christians; but when the Paynim heroine undertakes to set the besiegers' great tower on fire, I was with her, heart and soul. Then, too, when Tancred meets the supposed warrior in the night, their contest begins under cover of the darkness, and they fight so valiantly, I could never repeat the lines:

*"Alas Clorinda's life is nearly o'er—
The hour has come when she will breathe no more,"*

without tears coming into my eyes; and the same tears began to flow plentifully when I reached the part where the unfortunate lover pierces her with his sword, loosens the helmet of his dying foe as he supposes, sees that it is Clorinda, and, trembling with anguish, fetches water with which to baptise her.

"My heart seemed full to bursting when Tancred strikes the tree in the enchanted forest, sees blood flow from it, and hears a voice telling him that here again he has wounded Clorinda, and that it is his destiny to wound those he loves without knowing it, wherever he may be.

"The story took such firm hold of my imagination that what I had read of it began in an obscure manner

to form itself into a whole in my mind, and this pleased me so much that I tried to think of some way in which I could represent it. I wanted to get Tancred and Rinaldo acted, and found that two coats of mail which I had already made would suit them admirably. The grave Tancred was to have one made of dark grey paper with scales, and the other, which was made of gilt and silvered paper, was for the splendid Rinaldo. I could see it all so clearly before me that I gave a description to my playfellows. They were delighted at the idea, but could not understand how it was possible that it could be acted, and, above all, acted by themselves.

"I had an answer for every doubt, and coolly disposed at once in imagination of two rooms in one of the boys' houses near our own, without considering for a moment that his old aunt would never dream of letting us use them. I planned the theatre in the same easy fashion, though all I knew about the matter was that it must stand on wooden rafters, that folding-screens were necessary for the moveable scenes, and a large shawl or cloth for the background. Where all these things were to come from I had not considered.

"For the wood we found a delightful expedient. An old servant from one of our homes had taken a situation as forester, and we coaxed him to give us some young firs and birch-trees. They arrived, however, sooner than we could have hoped, and plunged us into the greatest perplexity. How were we possibly to get our piece ready for performance before the trees withered? We were all at a loss. We had neither room, theatre, nor curtain—nothing but the folding-screens.

"In our distress we betook ourselves once more to the lieutenant, and gave him a minute description of the wonders that were to be performed. Little as he under-

stood what we meant, he did much to help us,—collected all the tables he could get from our own and the neighbours' houses, put them side by side in a little room, placed the screens upright upon them, and produced a distant prospect by means of green curtains and the trees the forester had given us.

“It was evening by the time all was ready. The candles were lighted, the children and the maids took their seats, and the whole troop of heroes was in costume, when suddenly each of us discovered that he did not know what he was to say. In the eagerness of inventing, I had been so entirely taken up with the subject as to forget that of course every actor must be prepared with what he had to say, and know when it was to be said. During the bustle of preparation it had never struck the others either; they fancied it would be easy to act the hero, and that the sayings and doings of the personages inhabiting the new world into which I had transported them could not be difficult to imitate. They all stood in amazement, asking each other what ought to come first, while I, who, as Tancred, had assigned to myself the first appearance, came on the stage alone, and began to repeat some verses out of the poem. The passage, however, soon changed into narrative, in which I should have had to speak of myself in the third person. Godfrey, whose part it was to appear, refused to come forward, and I was obliged to retreat from before the face of the public amid a shout of laughter—a misfortune which wounded me deeply. The attempt had totally failed; yet the spectators kept their seats, and wished to see something. We were all in our costumes, so I plucked up my courage and wits, and determined to cut the knot by giving them David and Goliath. Some of my company of actors had already helped me in performing

it with the puppets, and the rest had often seen it performed. We distributed the parts, every one promised to do his best, and one droll little urchin even painted himself a black beard that in case any awkward pause should occur he might be able to fill it up with some harlequin's fun. To this proceeding I most unwillingly gave consent. It seemed to me contrary to the gravity of the piece, and I vowed within myself never again to attempt any performance without the greatest consideration beforehand."

CHAPTER VIII.

MARIANA, in her drowsiness, leant against her lover; he pressed her closely to himself, and while old Barbara was prudently finishing the remainder of the wine, went on with his story.

"My friends and I soon forgot the great dilemma in which we had placed ourselves by undertaking to act a play that had no existence, and my passion for converting every tale I read, or piece of history I was taught, into a drama, proved strong enough to conquer the most inflexible materials. I was perfectly convinced that everything which could please in the telling must produce a far greater effect when acted. I longed to see everything exhibited before my eyes on the stage. During our history lesson at school I always took particular notice of any remarkable stabbing or poisoning scenes. My imagination skipped the explanation and intrigue, and ran on to the interesting fifth act; indeed, I really began to write some plays backwards, beginning at the end, but not reaching the beginning in one single instance.

"At the same time, partly of my own free-will and

partly induced by my good friends, who had caught my love of play-acting, I read a mass of trashy plays, just as they chanced to come in my way. I was still in those happy years when everything has its charm, and all we long for is quantity and variety. But, sad to say, this was not the only way in which my judgment was misled. Those plays pleased me especially in which I fancied I could make a good figure, and there were very few indeed which I did not read under this agreeable delusion. Because, by the help of my active imagination, I could fancy myself in any character, I thought I should be able to represent it to others, and at the distribution of parts generally chose just those for which I was least suited; indeed, wherever it was at all possible, I took more than one character for my own share.

“Children at play know how to make something out of everything. A stick becomes a gun, a little slip of wood a sword, any small bundle of rags makes a doll, and every corner serves for a cottage. Such was the course of our private theatre. In perfect ignorance of our own powers we undertook everything, hesitated at no *quid pro quo*, and felt convinced that everybody would take us for the personages we pretended to be. Indeed, I am sorry to say everything was done in such commonplace fashion that at this part of my story I have not even one out-of-the-way absurdity to tell of. At first we played through the few pieces in which only men's characters appear, then dressed ourselves up as well as we could, and at last took our sisters into the game. In some families it was looked upon as a useful way of occupying ourselves, and company was invited to see us act. The lieutenant remained our faithful friend; he showed us how to make our entrances and exits, how to declaim properly, and what were the proper gestures to

be used, generally, however, earning but scanty thanks for all his trouble, as we fancied we understood the rules of theatrical art better than he could tell us.

"We soon took to acting tragedy, as we had often heard, and ourselves believed, that it was easier to write and represent a tragedy than to acquit one's-self well in comedy. And here, indeed, we were quite in our element. We tried to suggest the ideas of high rank and excellence of character by affectation and stiffness, and thought no small things of ourselves; but the height of bliss was reached when we were allowed to bluster and rave, stamp with our feet, and even throw ourselves on the ground in paroxysms of rage and despair.

"The girls had not long joined in our games before natural feeling began to make itself perceptible, and our party became divided by different little love-affairs, so that a farce was often played within a farce. The happy lovers among us pressed each other's hands behind the scenes in the tenderest fashion, and were lost in ecstasy at the ideal appearance they presented to one another decked out with ribbons and tinsel; while the unhappy rivals were eaten up with envy, and spitefully rejoiced in bringing all kinds of mischief to pass.

"These games were not useless to us, though we had begun them foolishly, and carried them on without any guidance. They exercised our limbs and our memories, so as to give an amount of flexibility in voice and manner which you seldom find in such young children. Indeed, that time was quite an epoch in my own life. My mind took its entire direction from the theatre, and my greatest happiness lay in reading, writing, and acting plays.

"Meanwhile my teachers went on with their lessons

I was intended for business, and had been already sent into a neighbour's counting-house; but at that very time my dislike to occupations that seemed to me of a lower class grew more powerful than ever. I was determined to devote all my energies to the stage, and find all my happiness there.

"I remember writing a poem—it must be among my papers now—in which the muse of tragic poetry and another female figure intended to personify trade, are supposed to contend valiantly for my worthy self. The idea is a very common one, and I do not remember now whether the verses were worth anything; but you shall see it, just to give you an idea of the terror, aversion, and passionate love which are so strong in it. What a fussy careful old matron I described, with the distaff in her girdle, keys at her side, and spectacles on nose; never idle, never at rest; quarrelsome, stingy, mean, and fretful; how wretched was the lot of those who were forced to bow beneath her rod, and perform their servile daily task in the sweat of their brow!

"But how different was the appearance of the other! What a cheering vision for sad and anxious hearts! Gloriously fashioned, her form and bearing proved her a daughter of freedom; a noble self-consciousness gave her dignity without pride. Her garments were in keeping with herself; they veiled without confining her limbs, and each charming movement of this godlike creature was repeated by the abundant folds of her robe as if from an echo of a thousand voices. What a contrast! You can easily fancy to which of those two my heart inclined. None of the usual characteristics of my Muse had been forgotten; the crowns and daggers, chains and masks handed down to me by my predecessors were all there. The contest between these two personages was

carried on with much vehemence, and, as at fourteen we generally draw the highest lights and deepest shadows very close together, their speeches abounded in vivid contrasts. The old matron spoke like one who would stoop to pick up a pin, the other like one who could give away kingdoms. Of course I am supposed to despise the warnings of the former, and turn my back on the wealth she promises me. Disinherited and naked, I surrender myself entirely to the Muse; she casts her golden veil over me, and shelters my nakedness."

And clasping Mariana closer, he exclaimed: "If I had only known then, my darling, that a different, but even lovelier, divinity would come to strengthen me in my resolutions and accompany me on my way, what a far happier turn my poem would have taken, and how interesting its close would have been! But it is no poem—it is truth and life that I find in your love. Let us enjoy it, and know and feel what we are enjoying."

The loud and eager tone in which he spoke, and the clasp of his arms, awoke Mariana. She tried to hide her confusion by caressing him, for she had not heard one word of the last part of his story. Let us hope that our hero may find more attentive listeners to his tales in future.

CHAPTER IX.

IN this way Wilhelm passed his time—his nights in the enjoyment of intimate and loving companionship, and his days in looking forward to the return of those delicious hours. Even at first, when hope and longing only had drawn him to Mariana, he had felt as if a new life had entered into him, and he had begun to be

another man; but, now he was one with her, his wishes were satisfied as if by a delightful habit, and he longed to improve and perfect the woman he loved so passionately—to carry her mind onward and upward with his own. She was his main thought, even during the shortest absence. At first he had felt how needful she was to him; but, now that he was bound to her by every human tie, she had become indispensable. He felt in his pure soul that she was half, and more than half, of himself, and his gratitude and devotion to her knew of no limits.

Mariana, too, succeeded in deceiving herself for some time, and shared the feeling of his intense happiness. If only the cold hand of self-reproach had not now and then made itself felt at her heart—and that, too, even when in Wilhelm's arms! But against this even the sheltering wings of his love were no certain protection. And then, when he had left her, and she sank down from the clouds into which his passionate love had raised her into a consciousness of her real condition, she was indeed to be pitied. While living in a vulgar mental confusion, either ignorant of her own position or deceiving herself with regard to it, her very thoughtlessness had been a help. The incidents to which her life had been exposed had happened one by one; enjoyment and annoyance had come by turns, and singly. Mortifications had been made amends for by vanity, and want by temporary superabundance: she could plead necessity as her law and habit as her justification, and thus, from hour to hour, and day to day, shake off disturbing feelings. But now the poor girl had been lifted for moments into a better world. She had looked down, as if from a height of light and joy, on to the desolate, outcast kind of life which she had been leading, and had felt what a miser-

able creature the woman is who excites longing without inspiring respect and love; yet she was in no way bettered by this, either outwardly or inwardly, for she had nothing that could raise her. If she looked into herself, she found an empty mind and a heart that had nothing to lean on. The very sadness of this state made her cling more eagerly to Wilhelm; indeed, her passionate love for him increased with every day that brought the danger of losing him nearer.

Wilhelm, on the contrary, was all this time soaring in the most blissful regions. To him, too, a new world had opened, but one abounding in the most glorious prospects. The first excess of his joy had scarcely subsided, when thoughts that till then had only been darkly moving within him burst out into bright light.

"She is mine! She has given herself completely to me! Beloved, sought after, adored as she is, she has given herself up to me, trusting in good faith alone; but she has not resigned herself to an ungrateful man." His heart was so overflowing with happiness that as he walked or stood he was ever repeating to himself the most sublime sentiments clothed in a stream of magniloquent words. He believed that through Mariana the hand of fate was snatching him out of the stagnant, slow, commonplace life from which he had so long desired to escape, and that in taking her he was only interpreting a clear warning given by destiny. The parting from his father's house and his family did not appear to him difficult. He was young, and knew little of the world, and his courage in beginning the race for fortune and happiness in its wide arena was raised and strengthened by his love. It seemed more than ever clear to him that he was destined for the stage. This exalted goal seemed draw nearer when he was struggling towards it hand

in hand with Mariana, and with self-complacent modesty he beheld in himself the first-rate actor who was to create that theatre of the future so longed and sighed for on every hand. All that had hitherto been slumbering in the innermost regions of his soul stirred within him. He combined these manifold ideas in one picture, painting it with the bright colouring of love, but on a misty background. The figures, it is true, ran into one another, but that only made the whole effect all the more charming.

CHAPTER X.

WILHELM was sitting at home, looking through his papers and making preparations for departure. All that savoured of his former destination was put aside; he was determined that his entry into the world should be free from every unpleasant reminiscence. But works of taste, the poets and the critics, were placed among the chosen few to be retained as old friends. He had made very little use of the critical works on art hitherto, and his desire for instruction began to revive on seeing that most of the theoretical books in his possession had not even been cut open. They had been bought in the full conviction that such books were necessary; but, with the best intentions, he had not succeeded in reading more than half of any one of them.

He had held fast to examples, however, all the more eagerly, and had made experiments in different ways, as far as his knowledge went.

Werner came in, and seeing his friend busy over these well-known papers, exclaimed:

"What, at those old papers again! I'll wager, though, that you do not mean to finish one of them. You're

always looking through them, and then beginning something fresh."

"It's not the business of a scholar to finish: he ought to practise, and that is sufficient."

"But he surely ought to finish as far as he can?"

"And yet I think it is open to question whether some good may not be expected from a young man who soon detects the faults and unsuitableness of anything he has undertaken, stops short in his work, and refuses to spend time and trouble on what can never be of any worth."

"I know you never cared to finish anything; you were always tired before you'd got half-way through. Why, when you were director of our puppet-show, you were always having new costumes and decorations made for the little dwarfs. First it was to be one tragedy, then another, and after all we never got further in any of them than the fifth act, where everything was in confusion, and the people fell to work stabbing one another."

"Well, if you come to speak of those times, whose fault was it that we ever began to unpick and take off the dresses that were so well fitted to the dolls and stitched on to their bodies, and put ourselves to the expense of a large and useless wardrobe? Were not you the one who always had a bit of new ribbon to sell, and understood how to humour and encourage me in my hobby, and turn it to good account for yourself?"

Werner laughed, and exclaimed: "Oh yes; I'm still very fond of remembering what profits I used to make out of your theatrical military campaigns; just like the army contractors in time of war. When you were equipping your army for the liberation of Jerusalem, I imitated the Venetians on the same occasion, and made a famous profit out of the affair. It always seems to me the most

sensible thing in the world to turn the folly of others to our own advantage."

"I am not certain that to try and cure them of their folly would not be a nobler kind of pleasure."

"Well, from what I know of them, I should judge that to be a useless effort. It's not an easy matter for even one man to become wise and rich, and seldom takes place except at the expense of others."

"Well," said Wilhelm, drawing out one manuscript from among the rest, "here's the 'Youth at the Cross-roads.' That at least is finished, though how, I won't venture to say."

"Throw it away!" cried Werner; "put it into the fire! The invention has nothing worthy of praise about it. That composition has annoyed me enough already, and I remember it displeased your father. The verses themselves may be well enough, but the idea is false throughout. I recollect your personification of Commerce—a shrivelled, miserable old sybil. You must have picked up her likeness in some poor little shop. In those days you knew nothing of real mercantile business. Why, I know of no man who has, or needs to have, a broader, more enlarged mind than a true man of business. What an extended view we get by means of the order in which our affairs are carried on! It enables us to see the whole at any moment, without any necessity for perplexing ourselves with details. And then what an advantage we gain from the system of book-keeping by double entry! It is one of the most delightful inventions of modern times, and ought to be introduced into every well-ordered household."

"Excuse me," said Wilhelm, smiling, "but you're beginning from the outward form, as if that were the thing itself. You business men generally add up and

balance until you forget the real sum-total of human life."

"No, my dear fellow; you don't see, I am sorry to say, that in this case the outward form and the matter itself are one and the same,—the one cannot possibly exist without the other. Order and clear arrangement increase the wish to save and earn. A man who manages his affairs badly likes to remain in the dark about them; he does not care to know how much he owes. But a careful man of business likes nothing better than to calculate the increase of his fortune day by day. Even a serious disaster would not dismay him, much as he might feel annoyed by it: he knows what profits he has to lay in the opposite scale. I'm satisfied too, that if you could once get a taste for business you would soon see that it gives an opening for the exercise of many intellectual gifts."

"Well, it's possible that the journey I am thinking of taking may alter my opinions."

"Of course it will. Depend upon it, you only want to be brought into contact with some great sphere of activity to be won over to our side for ever, and by the time you come back to us you'll be glad to take part in our effort, to win for ourselves by trading and speculation, some share of the money and good things which must necessarily be always circulating through the world. Only see how the different quarters of the globe have found it necessary to exchange their various natural and artificial productions. Now, could there be a more agreeable or interesting task for any man's mind than to note what particular article is at any one time most in demand, yet of which the supply either fails altogether or can only be commanded with difficulty; to know how to supply every one's wants easily and quickly,

and by prudence in laying in our stock beforehand to gain the advantages which offer themselves at every moment of this enormous circulation? It seems to me, this must be a pleasure to any man who has got a head."

As Wilhelm did not appear to dissent, Werner went on:

Only go and see a few large commercial towns and seaports; I'm sure you will be carried away by the sight. When you see the immense number of people employed and the wares arriving from and being despatched to such different regions, you will certainly feel it pleasant to have them passing through your own hands also. The smallest and most inferior commodities too, when seen in connection with trade as a whole, will cease to appear inferior in your eyes, because they help to increase the universal circulation by which you win your daily bread."

Werner's judgment had been formed by his intercourse with Wilhelm, and he had accustomed himself to think of *his* calling too, and of *his* business with feelings of exaltation; this he believed he had a better right to do than his friend; for reasonable and estimable as he thought Wilhelm on other points, he seemed in this case to be setting a high value on, and giving the whole weight of his mental energy to what, in Werner's eyes, seemed the most unreal and imaginary thing in the world. Sometimes he thought it was impossible that this mistaken enthusiasm should not one day be conquered—such a good fellow must, sooner or later, come on to the right track; and in this hopeful feeling, he went on speaking:

"The great men of this world have taken possession of the earth; they live in the midst of abundance and

superfluity; in our own quarter of the globe the smallest spaces have been already occupied and secured to their possessors; civil offices and professions are not lucrative; where then can we find a more legitimate method of acquiring, a more just mode of making conquest, than by commerce? If the princes of this world keep its rivers, roads, and harbours in their own power, and draw large profits from everything that passes by or through their possessions, have not we a right to seize, and rejoice in seizing, every opportunity by which our industry and activity can levy a toll on those articles which either the needs or luxurious habits of men have rendered necessities of life? I assure you that if you like to exercise your poetic gifts you may boldly venture to oppose my goddess to yours as an invincible and conquering queen. It's true she prefers the olive-branch to the sword, and knows nothing of chains and daggers, but she has crowns for her favourites—crowns which, (I say it without wishing to undervalue those of your goddess) gleam with pure gold fetched from its source, and pearls brought up from the depths of the ocean by her active servants."

This last attack did not quite please Wilhelm, but, remembering that Werner was in the habit of listening patiently to his own harangues, he took pains to hide his annoyance. He was reasonable enough too, to feel pleasure in hearing a man speak highly of his own calling; but at the same time he did not choose to hear the one to which he had devoted himself heart and soul attacked in any way.

"And for you especially," cried Werner, "who take such an interest in everything that concerns humanity, what a spectacle it would be to see the good fortune which accompanies a spirited enterprise realised before

your eyes! Where can there be a more beautiful sight than the return of a ship after a successful voyage, with a rich freight secured in good season? The imprisoned sailors jump on shore almost before their boat has touched the land, full of joy at feeling themselves free once more and able to trust the faithful earth with what they have taken from the false sea; and it is not only their friends and relations or the sharers in their enterprise who are delighted at the sight; the very passers-by are carried away with admiration. Our gains, my friend, don't show in figures alone. Fortune is the goddess of *living* men, and, in order to understand and truly feel the real worth of her favours, you must be a living man yourself, and must watch others who work and enjoy in the full exercise of their bodily senses."

CHAPTER XI.

It is time to make a nearer acquaintance with the fathers of these two friends. They were men whose stamp of mind was very different on most points, but who were agreed in regarding a merchant's as the noblest calling, and were both eagerly bent on gaining the advantages offered them by any kind of speculation. At the death of his father, old Meister had at once turned a valuable collection of paintings, drawings, engravings, and antiquities into money, had built and furnished his house in the very newest style, and invested the rest of his fortune in the most profitable manner. A considerable part of it had been placed in the business belonging to Werner's father, who was well known as an able merchant, and whose speculations were generally successful. But the wish nearest the heart of Wilhelm's father was to give

his son those qualities in which he felt himself to be deficient and to leave to his children such possessions as he himself held to be most valuable. He had a great fancy for all that was showy and striking, but it must at the same time be good and durable. Everything in his house was real and massive, his stores abundant, his plate heavy, and his china expensive. His guests, on the other hand, were few and far between, for every meal was a feast involving so much cost and trouble that it could not be frequently repeated. Life in his house took a quiet and monotonous course, the movements and recurring events of which could afford no one any pleasure.

The elder Werner's life, passed in a dark and gloomy house, was quite the reverse of this. After sitting at the ancient desk in his narrow counting-house until the day's business was done, he liked to eat well, and, if possible, drink better. But not alone; not only his family must be at table with him, but friends and even strangers, if they stood in any relation to his house. His chairs were of the old and primitive, but guests were daily invited to sit upon them. The dinner was so good that those who ate it forgot to notice the common service in which it came to table; and though his cellar was not over-full, the wine when drunk was generally replaced by better.

Such was the life of these two fathers who often met to consult upon their mutual affairs and this very day had decided that Wilhelm should be sent on a business journey.

"He can see a little of the world," said his father, "and at the same time push our affairs in one or two fresh places. You can't do a young fellow a better turn than by bringing him into his work early. Your son got through his journey so successfully, and did his business so well, that I'm curious to know how mine will

conduct himself. I'm afraid his experience will cost him more."

Old Meister had a very high idea of his son's character and talents, and only said this in the hope that his friend would contradict him and say something in praise of Wilhelm's wonderful talents. Here, however, he deceived himself. The elder Werner was a practical man; he trusted no one before he had proved him, and answered quietly:

"We must put everything to the proof. We can send him the same way, and give him written directions by which he must be guided. There are some debts to be collected and old acquaintances to be looked up; besides which, he can do something to forward that new speculation I was talking to you about the other day. Without exact details collected on the spot, we can do but little."

"He can get ready and start as soon as possible," answered old Meister. "But where can we get a suitable horse for him?"

"We need not look far for that. There is a shop-keeper in H—— who owes us some money; he is an honest man and has offered me a horse in payment. My son has seen it, and says it is a good useful animal."

"Wilhelm can go over by the coach and fetch it himself. He will then be back again in good time the day after to-morrow. Meanwhile we can get his portmanteau and the letters ready, so that he will be able to start the beginning of next week."

Wilhelm was sent for and made acquainted with their determination. Of course he was delighted at thus finding both means and opportunity for carrying out his plans placed in his hands, without any effort on

his own part. So strong was his master passion, so clear his conviction that he was acting quite rightly in delivering himself from the irksome restraints of his past life and striking out a new and nobler path, that his conscience did not give him the faintest uneasiness, nor did he feel the slightest scruple. On the contrary, the deceit he was on the point of practising seemed holy in his eyes, and he believed that in time to come his parents and relations would bless him for having taken this step—a step in which the remarkable conjunction of circumstances again, as he fancied, showed the guiding hand of destiny.

The time seemed very long until night came, and he could see his beloved Mariana again. He sat in his room thinking over the plan of his journey, just as a practised thief or a conjuror in prison might slip his feet occasionally out of the closely-locked fetters, in order to assure himself that his deliverance was possible, and nearer than his short-sighted gaolers fancied.

At last the happy hour came. He left the house, shook off everything that weighed on his mind, and took his way through the quiet streets.

On reaching the great square he raised his hands towards heaven, feeling that he was free, that every hindrance lay behind and beneath him. He fancied himself in the arms of his precious Mariana, or standing with her on the dazzling boards of a theatre; hopes thronged fast and raised him above this world: the watchman's voice calling the hour was the only thing that reminded him he was still on earth.

Mariana came to meet him on the stairs; how lovely she was! She had put on her new white *negligée* to receive him, and he thought she had never looked so charming. Thus the gift of the absent lover was being

first used in the arms of the present one; and when she passionately showered on her favourite all the wealth of those caresses which nature dictated and art had taught her, need we ask whether he felt happy and blessed?

He told her what had happened, and gave her a general idea of his plans and wishes,—that he would try to find employment and a lodging, and then return to fetch her. He hoped she would not refuse him her hand.

The poor girl was silent. She tried to hide her tears, and pressed him closely to her breast.

Wilhelm interpreted her silence favourably to his wishes, but still he would have preferred a direct answer, and that more especially to a question, which, with the greatest modesty and gentleness, he put at last: whether he might not venture to believe he was a father. But to this too she only answered by a sigh and a kiss.

CHAPTER XII.

THE next morning Mariana awoke to fresh sadness. She felt so lonely, feared the coming of day, remained in bed and wept. Old Barbara sat down by her bedside, and tried to encourage and comfort her; but her poor wounded heart was not to be cured so quickly. The moment was fast coming which the poor girl had been dreading as the last of her life. Is it possible to imagine a more anxious or distressing position? The man she really loved was leaving her for a time, and an unwished-for admirer threatening to return. If the two, as might easily be the case, should chance to meet, the most grievous consequences might result.

“Calm yourself, my darling,” said the old woman; “don’t spoil your beautiful eyes by crying. After all,

it's not such a very great misfortune to have two lovers. If you can shew affection to only one of them, you can at least be grateful to the other; and I am sure he does so much for you that he deserves to be called your friend."

"My precious Wilhelm," said Mariana through her tears, "had a foreboding that our parting was near. A dream told him what we have been so carefully trying to hide. He was sleeping so quietly at my side, when suddenly I heard him muttering indistinctly and in a tone of distress. I was so frightened that I woke him; and oh, how lovingly, tenderly, and warmly he embraced me! 'Oh, Mariana,' he said, 'you have delivered me from such a fearful dream. How can I thank you enough for having saved me from that awful hell! I dreamt that I was in some unknown region, far from you; yet your image was always hovering before my eyes. I saw you standing on a beautiful hill; the whole place lay in sunshine, and oh, how lovely you looked! But before long I saw your image gliding down, always lower and lower. I stretched out my arms towards you, but the distance was too great; you continued to glide down towards a large lake which lay at the foot of the hill—more a morass than a lake. All at once I saw a man give you his hand: he seemed to intend to lead you upwards, but went off on one side, and appeared to draw you after him. As I could not reach you I called out, hoping to warn you. When I tried to move, the earth seemed to hold me fast, and if I succeeded in moving I was hindered from going further by the water; even my voice seemed stifled by a weight on my chest.' This the poor fellow told me as he was recovering from his fear, and he rejoiced that this horrible dream had been banished by what he called such a blessed reality."

The old woman tried her best to bring her friend

down from these poetic regions into the commonplace realities of life; and with this view, made use of the good plan pursued by bird-catchers, when they try to counterfeit the tones of the birds they are trying to lure into their snares. She began by praising Wilhelm, admiring his figure and his eyes, and speaking warmly of his love for Mariana.

This pleased the poor girl. She got up, consented to be dressed, and seemed calmer. Old Barbara went on:

"I don't want to distress or vex you, my child, my darling; I would not rob you of your happiness. You mustn't misunderstand me, for you can't forget that I have always cared more for you than for myself. Only tell me what it is you want; we'll soon manage to bring it about."

"What can I want?" answered Mariana. "I love the man who loves me; I see that we shall have to part, and I feel as if I could never outlive that parting. Norberg is coming; we owe our very existence to him; we cannot do without him. Wilhelm is not rich—he can do very little for me."

"No; unfortunately, he's one of those lovers who have nothing but their hearts to offer, and they're just the men who make the most pretensions."

"Don't jeer. The poor fellow thinks of leaving home, going on the stage, and offering me his hand."

"We've got four empty hands already."

"You must decide," said Mariana; "I cannot. Thrust me whichever way you will, but remember one thing: I believe I have a pledge within which ought to bind us still more closely together. Remember that, and then decide which of the two I ought to leave and which to follow."

The old woman was silent for a few moments, and

then exclaimed: "You young people are always flying to extremes. Now I can't see why pleasure and profit should not be united. You love one; then let the other pay for it; only we must be sharp enough to keep them apart."

"Do what you like. I cannot think, but I will obey you."

"Well, we have this advantage:—we can always plead the manager's obstinate pride in the morals of his company; and both your admirers are accustomed to go to work cautiously and secretly. Leave times and seasons to me; but be sure you play the part I tell you. Who knows what may not happen to help us? If Norberg would only come now, while Wilhelm is away! I don't see who's to prevent you from thinking of the one in the arms of the other. I wish you joy of a son; he will have a rich father."

This way of looking at the matter was but short comfort for Mariana. Her feelings and convictions would not be brought into harmony with her situation, and a thousand trifles conspired to remind her at every moment of the painful facts she longed to forget.

CHAPTER XIII.

MEANWHILE Wilhelm had finished his short journey, and not finding the business friend to whom he had been sent at home, delivered his letter of introduction to the wife of the latter. She, however, could give him very little information in answer to his questions, as she herself was in violent agitation and the whole house in confusion.

After a time she confided to him—what, indeed, it

would have been impossible to hide—that her step-daughter had run away with an actor, a man who had lately left a small company of players, and had been staying in the place giving French lessons. The father, she said, was almost beside himself with grief and annoyance, and had gone to the justice-room to get the fugitives pursued. She reproached and abused both her daughter and the young man most violently, allowing neither of them a single praiseworthy quality; and complained at great length of the shame they had brought on the family—words which embarrassed Wilhelm not a little: it was as if this Sybil were rebuking and sentencing his own premeditated plans in a prophetic spirit. He felt a much deeper sympathy with the father when he came back from the justice-room in quiet grief, told his wife the result of his expedition in half-uttered words, then looked at Wilhelm's letter and ordered the horse to be led out, trying in vain to hide his embarrassment and absence of mind.

Wilhelm was going to mount his horse at once and leave them, thinking that under such circumstances he should not feel at ease in their house, but the good man would not allow the son of a father to whom he owed so much to depart without partaking of his hospitality and spending a night beneath his roof.

Our friend joined in a melancholy supper, passed a restless night, and hastened away early the next morning, the good people having unconsciously tormented him in the keenest manner by their tales and remarks.

He was riding slowly and thoughtfully along the road, when he suddenly saw a number of armed men coming across the fields, and by their long loose coats with broad facings, awkwardly shaped hats and clumsy weapons, simple countrified gait and easy carriage, re-

cognised them to be a detachment of country militia. They stopped under an old oak-tree, laid down their guns and threw themselves on the grass to smoke their pipes.

A young man rode up at the same moment; Wilhelm drew up his horse, and began a conversation with him; sad to say, he was obliged to hear the story of the fugitives over again, and this time accompanied by remarks in no way flattering either to themselves or the parents. He heard too, that the young couple had been overtaken and detained in a small neighbouring town, and that the troops had come hither for the purpose of taking them up. After a short time a cart appeared in the distance guarded by train-bands apparently more ridiculous than formidable. An ungainly town-clerk or recorder left the procession, rode up and began an exchange of compliments with the man of law on the opposite side, the same with whom Wilhelm had been talking. This took place on the district boundary with great conscientiousness, and was accompanied by remarkable gestures and grimaces, something as we may imagine a ghost and a magician might demean themselves at some hazardous nocturnal operation, the one within, the other without the magic circle.

Meanwhile the attention and even sympathy of the spectators was attracted to the cart, where the poor misguided pair sat side by side on some bundles of straw, looking tenderly at each other and scarcely appearing to notice the bystanders. This unseemly mode of conveyance had been accidentally necessitated by the breaking-down of an old chaise in which the lady had been transported at first; and on the accident happening she had begged that her friend might ride with her,

as till then he had been forced to walk handcuffed at her side, under the conviction that he had been guilty of some capital crime. These fetters added not a little to the interest of the group, especially as the appearance and movements of the young man, who often kissed his companion's hand, were dignified and pleasing.

"We are very unfortunate," she exclaimed to the bystanders, "but not so guilty as we seem. This is the way in which cruel men reward faithful love, and parents, after having entirely neglected their children's happiness, snatch them roughly from the arms of some joy which after so many long sad days has at last made them its own."

While the spectators were expressing their sympathy in various ways the legal ceremonies were being despatched; then the cart moved on once more, and Wilhelm, who took a great interest in these lovers, rode on by a footpath, in hopes of making acquaintance with the magistrate before the little procession should arrive. But he had scarcely reached the court-house, where great excitement prevailed and everything was in readiness for the fugitives, when his new acquaintance, the law-clerk, or actuary, overtaking him, began to give a circumstantial account of all that had happened and then to dilate at great length on the good qualities of his horse, which he had got only the day before in exchange from a Jew, thus preventing every attempt at any other kind of conversation.

The two unfortunate young people were set down outside the garden from which a little gate led into the court-house, and taken quietly in by this back way. Wilhelm expressed his sincere admiration of this considerate treatment to the young lawyer, and the latter accepted the praise though his real motive had been a wish to hoax the crowd who had assembled in front

of the court-house to enjoy the spectacle of a fellow-townswoman in humiliation.

The magistrate walked into his justice-room with heavy and reluctant steps. He was not fond of these exceptional cases, in which he generally only got out of one blunder to fall into another, and was often rewarded at last for his best efforts by a harsh rebuke from the government. He was followed into the room by the young lawyer, Wilhelm, and a number of the most respectable townsmen.

The lady was brought in first. Her manner in entering the justice-room was calm, self-possessed, and free from boldness. Indeed, her dress and behaviour altogether proved that she was not wanting in self-respect, and, without waiting to be questioned, she began to speak of her situation in a becoming manner.

The lawyer, however, commanded silence, and held his pen in readiness over a folded sheet of paper. The magistrate collected himself, glanced at the clerk, cleared his throat, and at last asked the poor girl her name and age.

"I beg your pardon, sir," she answered, "but it seems very strange to me that you should ask such a question, when you know my name well, and that I am of the same age as your own eldest son. What you really wish and ought to know about me, I shall have pleasure in telling you without circumlocution.

"Since my father's second marriage I have not been very kindly treated at home. I had two or three opportunities of marrying well, but my step-mother, fearing the expense of my marriage portion, placed such difficulties in the way as to prevent me from embracing them. I then became acquainted with young Melina, whom I could not but love; and as we plainly foresaw

the hindrances that would be put in the way of our marriage, we determined to go forth into the wide world together, and there seek the happiness that was denied us at home. I have taken nothing with me that is not my own; we did not fly like thieves and robbers, and my lover does not deserve to be dragged about bound and in chains. Our Prince is just; he would not allow such severity. If we are amenable to punishment at all, it is not to a punishment of this kind."

Hereupon the old justice's perplexities were doubled and trebled. Rebukes from the highest authorities sounded already in his ears, and the girl's fluent speech completely disturbed all his attempts at making a minute of the proceedings. Matters, too, continued to grow worse, for after her first declaration she refused to answer any of the regular questions which were repeatedly put to her, in any other way than by steadfastly referring to what she had already said.

"I have committed no crime," she said. "I have been publicly put to shame by being brought hither in a cart on straw, but there is a higher justice, and that will restore us to honour."

Meanwhile the young lawyer had been writing down all she said, and whispered to the justice—"only to go on: they would be able to draw up a formal indictment afterwards."

The old man, on this, plucked up his courage once more and now began, in the driest traditional formulas and words, to make inquiries of a most tender nature.

The blood rushed into Wilhelm's face, and the cheeks of the pretty, well-behaved delinquent grew bright with the beautiful colour of modesty. She was silent, and seemed unable to answer; but at last her very embarrassment appeared to raise her courage,

"Be assured," she exclaimed, "that I have strength of mind enough to confess the truth, even if it should tell against me, and ought I to hesitate and stammer when the confession does me honour? Yes, from the moment when I felt convinced that Melina loved and would be faithful to me, I looked on him as my husband, and refused him nothing which love has a right to demand, or a heart convinced as mine was, to grant. Do what you like with me. If I hesitated one moment to answer, it was *only* from fear lest my confession might injure my lover."

Wilhelm's opinion of the girl rose considerably on hearing this confession, but the legal officials called her an impudent hussy, and the townsmen present thanked God that such a case had never occurred (or at least never been made public) in *their* families. Wilhelm was picturing his own Mariana before the judge; her words he imagined as even more beautiful, her sincerity still more heart-felt, and her confession nobler. An intense, passionate wish to help these two lovers took possession of his mind; he did not conceal it, but begged the dilatory magistrate to put an end to the proceedings, urging that everything was as clear as possible, and no further examination could be needed.

This took effect in so far that the girl was allowed to withdraw; but in her stead the young man was brought forward, his fetters having been taken off outside the door. He seemed to take the matter more earnestly. His answers were graver, and though perhaps he showed less heroic frankness, the decision and careful arrangement of his evidence impressed the hearers in his favour.

His evidence agreed with hers in every particular but one: in order to shield her he obstinately denied what she had already admitted, and when his examina-

tion was ended, and she was allowed to return into the room, a scene followed between the two which carried our friend Wilhelm's heart by storm.

What usually happens only in romances and plays was now occurring in this comfortless justice-room before his eyes: a struggle which should be the more magnanimous: love strong in adversity.

"Can it be true?" he said to himself, "that the timid tenderness which refuses to show itself before the sun or the eyes of men, and only ventures to enjoy in deepest solitude and secrecy, can, when dragged by unkind hands before the world, be stronger and more steadfast than the other loud and boastful passions?"

To his comfort the trial closed before long. The lovers were placed in tolerably endurable confinement. If it had been possible, Wilhelm would have taken the girl to her parents that very evening, for he had determined to be mediator in this case, and try to bring about a happy and legitimate union between the two lovers.

He also asked the justice to allow him a private interview with Melina, which was granted without any difficulty.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE conversation of the two new acquaintances soon grew confidential and animated. For when Wilhelm told the poor depressed youth in what relation he stood to the parents of the girl, and offered his services as mediator with the best hopes of a happy result, the poor prisoner's distressed and anxious mind grew cheerful—he felt as if he were already set free and reconciled to his

parents-in-law; and they then went on to consider the question of a future profession and existence.

"There you can be in no difficulty," said Wilhelm. "Nature herself seems to have fitted both of you so thoroughly for the profession you have chosen. A pleasing figure, agreeable and melodious voice, and plenty of feeling; what can an actor wish for more? If I can help you by any introductions it will give me great pleasure."

"I thank you heartily," answered the other, "but I am afraid I should scarcely be able to make any use of them, as, if possible, I do not mean to return to the stage."

"There you are very wrong," said Wilhelm, after pausing to recover himself a little from his intense surprise at this remark. He had thought it a matter of course that, directly the actor and his young wife were set at liberty, he would look out for an opportunity of returning to the stage as naturally as a frog would seek the water; and now, to his astonishment, he heard the contrary.

"Yes," said the other, "I am resolved not to return to the stage. To my mind any kind of civil employment would be preferable, if I can only get it."

"That is a strange resolution," said Wilhelm, "and one which I cannot see to be right; for it is never advisable to leave the calling we have once adopted, unless under peculiar circumstances; and besides, I know of no life that presents so much which is agreeable, or so abounds in delightful prospects as an actor's."

"It is easy to see that you have never been one."

Upon which Wilhelm answered:

"Ah, sir, how seldom a man is satisfied with his own lot! He is always longing for that of his neighbour, while the neighbour in his turn is equally discontented."

"Still," said Melina, "there is always a difference between bad and worse; it is experience and not impatience that has led me to this course. Can there be a more miserable, uncertain and wearisome way of earning a morsel of bread? To beg it from door to door would be very little worse. What hasn't an actor to suffer from his comrades' envy, the manager's partiality, and the fickle temper of the public! He ought to have a skin like one of those bears, that you see led about by a chain with a number of dogs and monkeys, and flogged to dance to the bagpipe for the amusement of children and the mob."

On hearing this Wilhelm thought more within himself than he liked to tell the good fellow to his face, so gave him no direct answer, and the other expressed himself all the more freely on that account. "If there were only no necessity," he went on, "for a manager to fall at the feet of every member of the town-council in order to get permission to set a few more pence in circulation at any place for three or four weeks at fair-time. Our's was on the whole a very good fellow (though at times he annoyed me terribly), and I have often pitied him. For a good actor he must pay a good price, the bad ones he can't get rid of, and if he attempts to make his receipts equal his expenses the public are dissatisfied and he has an empty house; so that in order to keep above water he has to give performances at a loss to himself, and with a heavy heart. No, no, sir! if, as you say, you are inclined to do anything for us, I entreat you to speak most earnestly on the matter to my bride's parents. If they would only get me a small situation as clerk or collector, I should esteem myself fortunate."

After exchanging a few words more, Wilhelm left him promising to go early next morning and see what he

could effect with the parents of the bride, but he was no sooner alone than he relieved his feelings by exclaiming: "Unfortunate Melina! the miserable poverty that you cannot master lies in yourself, not in your circumstances. Would not any man find his position unendurable if, like you, he had adopted a profession, let it be art, mechanics, or what you choose, without an inward calling to that profession? The man who is born with a talent for the work he is born to do finds a delightful existence in that work. Nothing in this world is perfectly easy of accomplishment; it is the impulse within us, the love and joy we feel to and in our work that help us to overcome all difficulties, clear our path, and lift us out of the narrow circle in which others are miserably and anxiously wearying themselves. To you the boards of a theatre are *only* boards; your part is nothing but a schoolboy's task to be learnt by heart, and what you see in the spectators is only what they see in themselves on work-days. It may well be a matter of indifference to you whether you are sitting behind a desk, poring over ledgers, entering amounts of interest and hunting up arrears. You have no feeling of the great whole made up of co-working and burning elements, that can only be conceived, apprehended and carried out by the mind of man. You do not feel that in every human being there is a spark of nobler fire, which, if neither fed nor stirred into flame, may become buried under the ashes of daily material needs and indifference, but is very seldom, if ever, totally extinguished, and then not until late in a man's life. You feel no power in your own soul to fan that spark, no wealth in your heart to feed it. Bodily hunger is your spring of action, discomforts annoy you; you cannot see that such foes as these are lying in wait for us in every condition of life,

and can only be overcome by steadfast courage and a cheerful spirit. Yes, you are quite right to long for the narrow limits of some insignificant post; you are not capable of filling one where mind and courage are needed. Give a soldier, a statesman, a divine, views such as yours, and they too might murmur at the miseries of their position. Indeed there have been men who had so lost all real understanding and feeling for life, that they pronounced the existence and actions of their fellow mortals to be a mere nothing, an obscure and sorrowful state of being, a passing cloud of dust, and fraught with woe. If the images of your working fellow-men were stirring within you, if sympathy with them were warming your heart, if inner feeling were manifest in every look and movement, if the tones of your voice and the words of your lips were winning and lovely in men's ears, and if you felt a sufficiency in yourself, you would certainly seek place and opportunity to make yourself felt in others."

Such were our friend's utterances and meditations as he undressed; he lay down to rest completely at ease with himself. What he meant to accomplish on the morrow, in the stead of this undeserving man, unfolded itself like a romance before his mind; pleasant fancies attended him into the domain of sleep and then delivered him over to their sisters the dreams, who received him with open arms, and surrounded his slumbering head with visions of heaven.

The next morning he was awake betimes, pondering over the negotiation that he had in hand. His return to the poor forsaken parents astonished them not a little; he laid the subject of his visit before them respectfully and modestly, and found both more and fewer difficulties in the way than he had anticipated. The thing was

done; and though with especially hard stern natures the fact that anything is done beyond recall often is a reason for resisting it to their utmost power, and thereby making matters worse, yet, in the minds of most, that fact has an irresistible influence, and what seemed an impossibility once takes its place among the ordinary events of life when it has really occurred.

It was therefore soon settled that Melina should marry their daughter, she, however, in consideration of her bad behaviour, forfeiting all claim to a marriage portion, and also leaving in the hands of her father for some years at a low interest a legacy which she had inherited from an aunt. On the question of a future maintenance, there was more difficulty. They did not want to have this disobedient child always in their sight: they were a respectable family, they said, and could even name a superintendent in the church among their relatives: they should not wish their connexion with a fellow whose antecedents nobody knew to be always brought before them, which would certainly be the case if they yielded this point. Besides, it could hardly be expected that the government board would entrust him with any post. Both father and mother were equally strong in their opposition, and though Wilhelm (despising Melina as he now did, and grudging him such good fortune as a return to the stage,) argued vehemently on the other side, he could not change their resolution. Had he only known the secret motives of this opposition he would certainly have spared himself the trouble of trying to persuade such parents. The father would gladly have kept his daughter near him, but the young man was hateful in his eyes, because his wife had shown him a decided preference; and the mother could not abide the constant presence of a successful rival. Melina there-

fore, much more against his own will than that of his young wife who rather wished to see and be seen by the world, was obliged after a few days to depart in search of an engagement in some theatrical company.

CHAPTER XV.

HAPPY days of youth! Happy season of love's first longings, when we are like children talking to an echo, happy in taking all the burden of the conversation on themselves for hours at a time, and quite content if their invisible companion will only repeat the last syllables of the words they shout to him.

This was Wilhelm's case in the first, but more especially in these later days of his passionate love for Mariana. He passed over to her the entire wealth of his own feelings, deeming himself all the time only a beggar fed by her alms; and just as a landscape gains most, sometimes all its charm from the sunshine which falls on it, so every thing that surrounded Mariana or came in contact with her received a beauty and a glory not its own in Wilhelm's eyes.

He had obtained permission from the manager to go behind the scenes and made it a place of constant resort; the enchantment of perspective certainly lost all its power there, but the more mighty magic of love only then began its work. He would stand for hours close to the dirty light-frame, inhaling the smoke of tallow candles, and looking out at his darling; when she came back and smiled on him, he felt as if those skeleton walls of beams and laths were a very paradise. The stuffed lambs, the waterfalls of tin-foil and the sham cottages raised lovely and poetic visions of an old pastoral world. Even the

ballet dancers who were so ugly close at hand, ceased to be repulsive, because the boards they danced on were trodden by his beloved Mariana. Certain indeed it is, that as arbours of roses, myrtle groves, and moonshine owe their life to the influence of love, love too can give the appearance of living nature to mere shavings and shreds of paper. It is a seasoning powerful enough to flavour the most tasteless or even nauseous sauce.

And indeed without such a seasoning he could never have borne the condition in which he usually found her room and sometimes herself, much less have learnt, as he did later, to think it agreeable.

Wilhelm had been brought up in a refined middle-class family; order and cleanliness had been the element in which he breathed, and inheriting as he did something of his father's taste for outward show, he had, when a boy, furnished his own room, to him a little kingdom, in a somewhat splendid fashion. His bed-curtains hung in heavy folds, and were fastened up with tassels in the style in which thrones are usually represented. He had a carpet put down in the middle of the floor, and an elegant cloth on his table, and had a habit of so picturesquely arranging his books, furniture, and other possessions, that a Flemish painter could have copied them at once as groups for the still life of his pictures. He converted a white cap into a turban, and had the sleeves of his dressing-gown cut short to look like an Eastern dress, for which proceeding however he gave as a reason that, when long, they hindered him in writing. When he was alone in the evening, and had no fear of interruption, he often wore a silken sash round his waist, into which it was even said that sometimes he stuck a dagger taken from some old armoury, and in this guise learnt and rehearsed the tragic parts allotted to him,

performing his devotions too in the same idea, kneeling on his carpet.

An actor, he thought in those days, must indeed be a happy man, possessing so many splendid dresses, suits of armour and weapons; constantly practising a grand and noble style of behaviour; his mind a very mirror of the most glorious and splendid situations, sentiments, and passions that the world has ever produced. In the same way Wilhelm fancied the private life of an actor to be one series of dignified actions and occupations, of which his appearance on the stage was the culminating point; something as a mass of silver, which at last comes out from the prolonged action of the refiner's fire so pure to sight and reflecting every colour so brightly as to prove to the eye of the workman that the metal is now free from all alloy.

With such ideas his surprise at the state of his beloved Mariana's room had at first been very great, that is, so far as he could clearly discern it through the mist of happiness by which he was surrounded. Scattered about the floor in great disorder, like the shining scales of a fish stripped off, lay the fragments of some temporary, light, artificial finery; no attempt had been made to hide the various implements of cleanliness, such as soap, combs and towels, or the traces of their use. Music, parts of plays, shoes, linen and artificial flowers, cases and boxes for such things, hair-pins, rouge-pots and ribbons, books, straw hats and bonnets, all lay in the most neighbourly manner together, united by one common element, powder and dust. But as Wilhelm when he was with Mariana saw little else but her, indeed could not but feel a love for everything that belonged to her or came in any close contact with her, he began at last to find a charm in that strange

confusion which the orderly arrangement of his own splendid room had never given him.

When he had, for instance, to move her corset in order to get at the piano, to lay her petticoat on the bed before he could take a seat, or when, indeed, as was often the case, her manners before him were more natural and unembarrassed than is allowed by the usual laws of decency, he felt as if all this was drawing him nearer to her every moment: as if the fellowship between them was being strengthened and made faster by invisible bands.

Occasionally however he met other members of this company of players during his first visits to Mariana, and found their behaviour more difficult to reconcile with his own ideas. Busy in idleness, they seemed to occupy themselves with anything rather than their own calling and what ought to have been their aim in life. He never heard them discuss the poetical merit of any piece, or give any opinion on it whatever, correct or incorrect. The question was always: Will it pay well? will it draw? how long will it run? how often do you think it can be given? with others of the same kind. After this they would generally attack the manager, murmuring at his stinginess with regard to their salaries, and particularly at his favouritism and injustice. This would be followed by complaints that the public so seldom applauded the really best actors, with remarks on the German theatre; how its actors were deservedly becoming more and more appreciated and indeed never could be held in too high honour. They spoke, too, a great deal about different coffee-houses and refreshment-gardens, and what had been done and said there; of the debts of one or other of their colleagues, and how much had to be deducted from his salary in consequence; of the dispro-

portion in these weekly salaries and of the cabals of some opposition party, in connexion with which they would possibly return to mention the great and merited favour shown them by the public, and perhaps touch on the influence of the drama on the culture of nations and the world.

These things had already given Wilhelm many uneasy hours, and now, as he rode slowly homewards, meditating on what had just passed, they all came back to his mind. He had just been an eye-witness of the agitation caused, not only in a respectable family, but in the entire population of a small town, by the elopement of a young girl. The scenes on the highroad and in the justice-room, Melina's opinions, and all that had preceded and led to these, rose up so vividly before his lively and apprehensive imagination, and brought with them a state of such restless anxiety, that he could bear his thoughts no longer and spurred his horse to carry him more quickly to the town.

But in doing this he was only hastening to meet fresh vexations. His friend and presumptive brother-in-law, Werner, was waiting to enter on a most grave, important and quite unexpected conversation with him.

Werner was one of those experienced and decided people, who are often called cold, because they do not, on occasion given, fire up either quickly or visibly. His intercourse with Wilhelm was one continual strife, but a strife which only knit them more closely together, as, notwithstanding the different tone of their minds, each of the two friends found his account in the other. Werner was proud that now and then, in appearance at least, he was able to curb Wilhelm's powerful though somewhat extravagant intellect; and for Wilhelm it was a glorious triumph to see his circumspect friend carried away by

one of his own warm ebullitions of enthusiasm. Each was being trained by intercourse with the other; they were accustomed to see each other daily and one might have said that the very impossibility of making themselves mutually intelligible increased their longing to meet and discuss matters. In reality however, both being good genuine men, were walking side by side and hand in hand on the same road and to the same goal, and could not understand how it was that neither of them could ever succeed in bringing the other over to his own opinions.

Werner had noticed that Wilhelm's visits had lately become less frequent, that he often broke off absently and abruptly in speaking of his favourite subjects, and that he no longer became absorbed, as used to be the case, in carrying out vivid pictures of strange ideas—one of the surest proofs a man can give that his mind is under no restraint, and that he finds rest and content in the presence of his friend. Werner, prudent and punctilious, looked for the fault in himself, until some gossip from the town put him on the right track and a few unguarded acts on Wilhelm's part brought further evidence. He then began an enquiry, and soon discovered that Wilhelm had some time ago publicly visited an actress, had spoken to her in the theatre and accompanied her home. He would have been in despair if he had known of the nightly rendezvous, as he was told that Mariana was a most attractive girl, and would probably take his friend's money, while allowing herself at the same time to be supported by another and a most disreputable lover.

No sooner had his suspicions become certainty than he determined to attack Wilhelm on the subject, and by the time his friend returned dispirited and vexed from

his journey, Werner's preparations were in perfect readiness. That very evening he told Wilhelm all he knew, at first calmly, and then with the earnest gravity of a well-meaning friendship. He left no single point in doubt, and gave his friend a plentiful taste of all that bitterness which unimpassioned men are wont to dispense so liberally and with so much virtuous and malignant pleasure to lovers. But, as we may well believe, to little purpose. Wilhelm answered confidently, though with inward agitation: "You do not know her; possibly appearances may not be in her favour, but I feel as certain of her truth and virtue as of my own love."

Werner persisted in his accusation, offering proofs and witnesses. Wilhelm rejected them and left his friend, feeling annoyed and shaken, like a man whose unsound but firmly-seated tooth has been wrenched at in vain by an unskilful dentist.

He was disturbed and vexed that the beautiful vision of Mariana should be so blurred and dulled in his mind, first by his own idle fancies on the journey and then by Werner's unkindness; indeed he felt as if it were almost defaced. But he adopted the surest means of restoring its original brightness and clearness: he took his way to her as usual that very night. She had seen him ride past on his way into the town, expected he would come at night, and was so delighted to see him that we may well believe every doubt was soon driven from his mind. Indeed her tenderness so entirely reassured him that he told her how the world and his own friend had been wronging her.

And then their eager conversation led them back to the time when they first learnt to know each other; recollections which always form the most delightful theme of conversation to lovers. Those first steps into the labyrinth

of love are so very pleasant, and its glimpses of the future so lovely that we are only too fond of calling them back to our memory. Each of the talkers tries to prove that his or hers was the earliest, the most disinterested love; but each wishes rather to be conquered than to conquer in this strife of words.

Wilhelm repeated what Mariana had already heard so often: how soon his attention had been won from the play to herself, how her figure, acting, and voice had so captivated him that at last he had only gone to see the pieces in which she appeared; then had stolen secretly behind the scenes and had stood close to her often without her knowledge; and then he went off into an ecstasy over that one happy evening on which he had found an opportunity of doing her some little service and so beginning a conversation.

Mariana, on the contrary, would not allow that it was so long before she noticed him. She maintained that she had seen him on the public promenade, and in proof of her assertion described his dress on that day, saying that he had pleased her then more than any one else, and she had wished to make his acquaintance.

How readily Wilhelm believed all she said! it gave him such pleasure to be persuaded into the belief that when he came near her she felt an irresistible attraction to him: that she had often purposely approached him behind the scenes to see him more nearly, and in the hope of making his acquaintance, but that he had been so terribly reserved and shy that at last she had herself given him the opportunity by almost compelling him to fetch her a glass of lemonade.

They carried on this loving contest through every detail of their short romance; the hours slipped away quickly, and by the time Wilhelm left his darling Mariana

his mind was calm and his determination fixed to carry out his former plan without delay.

CHAPTER XVI.

WILHELM'S parents had made every arrangement necessary for his journey; but, as one or two trifles were still wanting to complete his outfit, his departure was delayed for a few days. This time he made use of to write a letter to Mariana, the theme of which was to be that subject which she had hitherto always avoided. The letter ran as follows:

"Night is around me as I sit and write to you, the same kind veil of night that has so often sheltered and screened us in each other's arms; my thoughts and plans in this moment are all for you. Oh, Mariana, I am the happiest of men. I am like a bridegroom standing before the altar; he feels beforehand the new world about to be unfolded in and through him, and while the marriage ceremony is being performed his thoughts and longings transport him to the front of that mysterious curtain from behind which the loveliness of love comes forth softly whispering to meet him.

"I have prevailed on myself not to see you for some days; but this was easy in the hope of such a recompense as I am looking forward to; that recompense will consist in being always with you, yours to all eternity. Surely there is no need for me to repeat my wish, and yet I must, for I fancy you have not understood me hitherto.

"My faithful love for you, which ventures to say so little because it longs to keep all, has often in low tones tried to sound your heart and discover whether you too wished that we might be united for ever. I am sure

you must have understood me; the same wish must have arisen in your own heart; you must have felt what I meant in every kiss and in the peace and rest which clung around us on those happy evenings. But just in this I recognise your delicacy of feeling, and oh, how much it has increased my love! Any other woman would have artfully endeavoured behaviour to create an exaggerated amount of sunshine, and thus to bring her lover's decision quickly to maturity, draw a declaration from him and secure his promise; but just at that point you draw back, you stop the half-uttered expression of your lover's feelings, and try to hide your own agreement with his wishes under an appearance of indifference. But I understand you. I should be a wretch indeed if I did not recognise just by this sign the pure and unselfish love which is only solicitous for your friend. Trust me and calm yourself. We belong to each other; we shall neither of us lose or forsake anything by living for each other. Then take my hand; it is a needless token I admit, but still a solemn one. We have already tasted all the joys of love, but there lies fresh bliss in a confirmation of the thought that it will last for ever. Ask no questions. Take no thought for the future: destiny takes thought for love and all the more surely because love is easily satisfied.

"My heart has already long forsaken my parents' house; just as my mind is always on the stage, so my heart is always with you. Oh, my darling, surely my wishes have been combined in their fulfilment in a manner never vouchsafed to mortal man before. My eyes feel no desire for sleep; your love and your future happiness rises before them like an eternal rosy dawn.

"I can hardly prevent myself from starting up and rushing to you; I would force you to grant my petition

and then start off early to-morrow morning to struggle for my object in the great world.—But no, I am determined to control myself, I will not take any rash, foolish steps; I have sketched a plan, and I will follow it out.

“I know Serlo, the manager, and shall go direct to him. A year ago he often said that he wished his people had some of my enthusiasm for the stage; he will certainly be glad to have me. There are one or two reasons for which I would rather not join the company you are now with, and besides, Serlo is playing so far from here that I can keep my plan secret for the first. I shall be able to maintain myself tolerably at once, and when I have had time to look round at his public and get acquainted with the members of his company I shall come and fetch you.

“You see now, Mariana, what I can bring myself to do in order to be sure of possessing you; I confess I hardly dare to think what it will be not to see you for so long and to know that you are in the wide world without me. But then the remembrance of your love comes back into my mind; that love secures me against everything, and if you will only grant my entreaty and join your hand with mine in the presence of a priest before we part, I shall be able to go away calmly. I know that it is only a form between us, but it is a beautiful form—the blessing of Heaven on the blessing of Earth. It can be easily and privately done in the Knights' Chapel here in our neighbourhood.]

“For the first I shall have money enough—enough for us both; and when that is gone Heaven will come to our help.

“No, dearest, I am not at all afraid. What began so happily must have a happy end. I have always felt

sure that any man who was really in earnest could make his way in the world, and I feel courageous enough to earn abundance for two, or even more. Many people call the world ungrateful; I have never found it so when you tried to do anything for it in the right way. My whole soul seems on fire when I think that some day I may be able to come forward and speak straight to the hearts of people what they have so long been craving to hear. The theatre seems to me something so great and glorious that I have thousands of times been cut to the heart to see the most pitiful fellows coming forward and fancying they could reach our hearts with some grand, choice sentence. Why, a forced falsetto would sound better and purer. It is unheard of what sins these men commit in their bungling awkwardness.

“The theatre and the pulpit have often been at variance, but it seems to me that they never ought to strive with one another. God and Nature should be glorified in both and only by means of noble-minded men. These are not dreams, dearest; as I have been able to feel by your heart that you love me, so I will seize this brilliant thought and say—no, I will not say it positively, but I will hope—that at some future time we may appear before our fellow-men as two good spirits, come to open their hearts touch their feelings and bring them hours of divine delight, just as surely as when close to you joys have been granted me which could only be called divine because in those moments we were raised out of and above ourselves.

“I cannot close my letter; I have said too much already, and yet I do not know whether I have said all that it concerns *you* to know. As to my own heart, no words can describe what is going on incessantly within it.

“For the present take this letter, my own love. I have looked through it and find that I ought to re-write the whole, but yet it contains all you need know to prepare you for my coming again to you in all the happiness of sweetest love. I feel something like a prisoner in a dungeon, filing at his fetters and listening the while. Good-night, my sleeping, unconscious parents! Farewell, my darling. I will leave off for the present: it is already late in the night and my eyes have closed two or three times from drowsiness.”

CHAPTER XVII.

WILHELM, with his letter neatly folded in his pocket, longed so much for Mariana that it seemed as if the day would never end, and contrary to his usual habit he set out for her lodgings almost before it was dark. His plan was to announce himself for the night, stay a very short time with Mariana, put his letter into her hand before leaving, and then, on his return at night, either receive her assenting answer, or obtain it by force of loving caresses. He flew into her arms and could scarcely control his feelings. At first his own eagerness and excitement prevented him from noticing that she did not respond as heartily as usual, but her uneasiness could not be hidden long; she pleaded indisposition, complained of headache and would not consent to his proposal to return at night. He suspected nothing and did not press the point, but felt this was not a fitting opportunity to give her his letter. He did not therefore produce it, and as both her manner and words seemed politely to imply that she wished him to leave, he seized a little neckkerchief in the intoxication of his insatiable

love, stuffed it into his pocket, and much against his will turned away from her kisses and her door. He stole home, but finding no rest there, changed his dress and went out again into the fresh air.

He had passed through one or two streets when a stranger met him and asked the way to a certain inn. Wilhelm offered to shew him the house; on their way the stranger made various enquiries as to the names of the streets, the owners of some large buildings which they passed, and the police-regulations of the town; so that by the time they reached the inn, they were already in the midst of an interesting conversation. The stranger begged his guide to come in and take a glass of punch, giving at the same time his name, the name of his birthplace, and the business which had brought him there, and asking Wilhelm to show him the same confidence. Wilhelm gave his name and address without hesitation.

"Are not you," asked the stranger, "the grandson of that old Meister who owned the beautiful art-collection?"

"Yes, I am. I was ten years old when my grandfather died, and it distressed me very much to see those beautiful things sold."

"Your father made a large sum of money by the sale."

"Then you are acquainted with the facts?"

"Oh, yes; I saw the treasures, when they were still in your house. Your grandfather was no mere collector; he really understood art, and his visit to Italy was made at so early and favourable a time that he brought back treasures which are not to be had now at any price. He had choice pictures by the best masters, and you could hardly believe your eyes on looking through his collection of drawings. There were priceless fragments

too among his marbles, and a very instructive series of bronzes; the coins and medals were all carefully chosen to illustrate art and history, the few gems deserved great praise, and though the rooms of the old house were not built symmetrically, the whole collection was well arranged in them."

"You can imagine what a loss it was to us children, when all those things were taken down and packed up. Those were the first sad hours in my life. I remember how empty the rooms looked as one by one the things vanished which had been our delight from childhood and which we fancied were firm and unchangeable as the house itself or even the town in which it stood."

"If I do not mistake, your father placed the money obtained by this sale in a neighbour's business, and went into a kind of partnership with him."

"Quite right; and their joint speculations have succeeded very well. In the last twelve years they have increased their fortune considerably and are all the more eager for further gains. The elder Werner too, has a son who is much better suited for this kind of work than I am."

"I am sorry this place should have lost such an ornament as your grandfather's collection. I saw it only a short time before it was sold; indeed, I may say it was through my means that that sale really took place. A wealthy nobleman and great amateur sent me here to pronounce an opinion, as he did not fully trust his own in so important a matter. My inspection lasted six days, and on the seventh I advised my friend to give the whole sum asked without hesitation. You were a lively little fellow then, and often with me; you explained the subjects of the paintings, and indeed, understood very well how to show the whole collection."

"I remember that there was such a person, but I should not have recognized him in you."

"Well, it's a long time ago now, and we all alter more or less. If I remember rightly you had a favourite picture there and would hardly let me go away from it."

"Quite right; it represented the story of the sick prince wasting away for love of his father's bride."

"I cannot say that it was one of the best pictures; neither composition nor colouring were good, and the treatment of the subject was decidedly affected."

"That I did not understand then, nor do I now; the charm of a picture for me lies in its subject, not in the art with which it is painted."

"Your grandfather seems to have thought differently; the larger part of his collection was made up of first-rate things, and whatever the subject might chance to be, the artist's merit was always discernible. That picture too had been hung in the furthest room—a sign that he thought lightly of its worth."

"Yes, that was where we children were allowed to play, and where that picture made an impression on my mind so indelible that even your criticism, which I respect, would not be able to efface it, were we standing before the painting now. How I used to pity—how, indeed, I pity still a youth forced to lock up within himself all those sweet impulses, the best inheritance we have received from nature; and so to conceal in his own bosom the fire which ought to warm and enliven himself and others that his inmost heart consumes in fearful anguish. And I pity too the miserable girl who has found a man worthy of her true, pure love, and yet must devote herself to another."

"These feelings are certainly very dissimilar from the

meditations in which a real lover of art is accustomed to indulge on examining the works of great masters, but perhaps if the collection had remained in your house, you might by degrees have acquired a taste for the works themselves, and have learnt to see something else in them beside yourself and your own inclinations."

"There is no doubt that I was very much grieved at the collection being sold, and have often missed it since in riper years; but when I remember that this very sale was as it were necessary in order to develop a predilection and a talent which was to have a far greater influence on my life than those lifeless pictures ever could have had, I submit with pleasure and reverence that destiny which knows so well how to bring about what is best not only for me but for every one."

"I am sorry to hear that word 'destiny' again, and from a young man too who is just at the age when we usually hear the will of higher powers pleaded as an excuse for our own strong tendencies."

"But don't you believe in destiny—in a power ruling and guiding us for our good?"

"I am not now speaking of my own belief, nor is this the place to explain the method in which I try, at least in some measure, to form conceptions of things which are incomprehensible to us all; the question now before us is what mode of representing these things conduces most to our profit. The web of this world is made up of necessity and chance: human reason takes her stand between these two, and knows how to govern them; she treats necessity as the foundation of her existence, disposes, guides, and makes use of accident and chance. Only so long as she remains there, firm and immovable, does man deserve to be called a god of this earth. Woe to him who has accustomed himself from youth up

to see in necessity something of an arbitrary will, and who chooses to ascribe to chance a kind of reason, which to obey is even a religion! Can this be called by any better name than a renunciation of our own reason, a giving full play to our own inclinations? We saunter on through life without consideration, allowing ourselves to be determined by any pleasant chance or accident, believe ourselves pious in so doing, and end by calling the results of this irresolute and vacillating existence a leading of Divine Providence."

"Well, but has it never happened to you to be led by some trivial circumstance into taking a certain path, to be met early on that path by a propitious incident, and then by a series of unexpected occurrences to be guided at last to an end, which you yourself had scarcely contemplated? Should not this inspire us with submission to fate, and confidence in such guidance?"

"With such sentiments as these no woman could be sure of her virtue, no man keep his money in his purse; there is no want of happy chances for getting rid of both. No, the only man I can admire is he who, knowing what will really benefit himself and others, labours to control his own self-will. The happiness of each of us lies in his own hands, just as the raw material which the artist intends modelling into some figure; but it is with this art as with all the others; the faculty only is given us at birth; the art itself must be learnt and diligently practised."

They went on for some time discussing this and other subjects, and when they parted at last, though neither appeared to have been specially convinced, they still appointed a place of meeting for the next day.

Wilhelm walked up and down a few streets. He heard the sound of clarinets, horns, and bassoons, and his breast

heaved with pleasure. It was a band of strolling musicians, and their music sounded sweetly in the silent night. He spoke to them and for a small sum of money they followed him to Mariana's apartments. The square before her house was ornamented with tall trees; here he placed his minstrels, threw himself on a seat at some distance, and allowed the floating soothing melody to work its full impression on him in the refreshing night air. Lying there beneath the lovely, gracious stars, existence seemed a golden dream. "She hears this sweet music too," he thought in his heart, "and she knows whose love and thought it is that fills the night with pleasant sounds. This harmony unites us though we are apart, and however far asunder we shall always be united by the most delicate, aerial harmonies and moods of love. Two loving hearts are like two magnetic clocks; what stirs in the one must move the other, for both are moved and pervaded by one power. When in her arms, do I ever feel it possible to leave her? and yet I must; I shall be far away from her, but I shall seek a resting-place for our love, and have her ever with me. How often it has happened that when I have been away from her and absorbed in thinking of her, I have chanced to touch a book, a dress, or some other article and fancied I felt her hand, so entirely was that moment clothed with her presence. And then if I recall those moments which avoid the light of day as well as the eyes of cold spectators,—moments to enjoy which the very gods themselves might well forsake their painless state of pure and perfect bliss.—Recall them! Can one possibly recall the wonderful intoxication of that cup, which takes our senses captive, binds them with heavenly fetters and withdraws them completely from their own control? And then herself—" He became lost in thought, the

peace he had felt changed into longing, he grasped a tree and cooled his burning cheek against its bark; the agitated sighs which pressed fast from his pure and loving heart were greedily inhaled by the night-wind. He felt for the little handkerchief he had taken from her, but it had been forgotten and left in his other clothes. His lips felt parched and his frame trembled.

The music ceased; he seemed at once to fall out of the element which had hitherto carried his sensations upward, and his restlessness increased now that the soft tones were no longer there to nourish but at the same time soothe his feelings. He sat down on her threshold; this calmed him in some measure. He kissed the brass knocker, kissed the door-sill which her feet had so often trodden, and warmed it with the fire that was burning in his own breast. Then he sat still a little while thinking of her. He saw her behind her curtains sweetly sleeping in her white night-dress, with the red ribbon round her head, and in his thoughts he seemed so near her that he fancied she too must be dreaming of him.

His thoughts were lovely, like the spirits of twilight; calm peace and yearning desire alternated in his heart, and love drew her trembling hand across the chords of his soul in a thousand different strains. It seemed as if the spheres above him ceased their own songs to listen to the soft low melodies of his heart.

If he had had the master-key with which he generally entered Mariana's lodgings, he certainly could not have restrained himself, he must have pressed into that shrine of love; but, as it was, he turned slowly away and wandered along under the trees with a dreamy uncertain step. His intention was to go home, but he turned back perpetually. At last however he really prevailed on himself to go, but on looking back once more as he

turned the corner, it seemed to him as if Mariana's door opened and a dark figure came out. He was not near enough to see clearly, and before he had time to collect his thoughts and use his eyes the vision had disappeared in the darkness of night. A long way off he fancied he saw it again, passing by a white house. He stood still trying to distinguish clearly, but before he could pluck up heart and start in pursuit, the phantom had really disappeared. Whither should he pursue it? Which street had the man turned into, if indeed it were a man?

He felt all at once like one whose eyes have been dazzled by a flash of lightning, that has illuminated for a moment the corner of some dark region; in the darkness that succeeds he seeks vainly for the figures he saw there and for the connexion of the paths. Such was the state of things before Wilhelm's eyes and in his heart. And just as endless doubts are left in the mind by the appearance of some awful and terrifying midnight spectre, which yet in calmer moments we look upon as born of our very terror, so Wilhelm felt disquieted beyond measure; he stood leaning on a stone at the corner regardless of the crowing cocks and brightening dawn, until driven home by the signs of wakening activity in the earlier trades.

By the time he reached home, he had succeeded in driving the whole illusion from his mind by the most weighty and convincing arguments; still, the charming and beautiful mood of the night was gone; that too had become a mere vision. As a comfort to his heart and in order, as it were, to set a seal on his returning confidence, he took the handkerchief out of his other pocket, and was pressing it to his lips, when the rustle of a falling paper made him draw it quickly away. He picked up a little note and read as follows:

“How I love you, you little fool! but what was the matter with you yesterday? I am coming to you to-night. I can well believe that you are sorry to leave this place, but have patience and at fair-time I shall follow you. But listen, don't put on that black-green-brown jacket again. You look like the witch of Endor in it. Didn't I send the white *negligé* on purpose to have a little white lamb in my arms? Always send your notes by the old Sibyl; the devil himself could not have chosen a better Iris.”

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

ANY man whom we see in the act of striving earnestly and vigorously to attain some object, may (quite apart from our opinion of his aim) be sure of our sympathy. So soon, however, as the matter is decided we cease to gaze; things completed, settled and done with lose all power of rivetting our attention, and this is more especially the case if we have already foretold an unsuccessful conclusion to the affair.

For this reason we will not entertain our readers with details of the grief and distress into which our unfortunate friend was plunged by the unexpected ruin of his wishes and plans. We will rather pass over a few years, and after briefly relating such facts as are necessary to connect the parts of our story, return and look for him again where we may hope to find him in a kind of activity and enjoyment.

Just as the plague or a fever will rage more violently and make more rapid progress in a perfectly healthy vigorous frame, Wilhelm's entire self, body and mind, was in one moment completely disturbed and unsettled by the terrible fate that had so unexpectedly overtaken and overcome him. Sometimes we see a firework ignite accidentally while it is being prepared; the cases so ingeniously bored and filled and meant if let off according to the original plan, to produce beautiful and varying fire-pictures in the air, fly hissing and whizzing athwart

each other in dangerous disorder. Thus it was with Wilhelm; hope and joy—bodily and mental delight—what he had experienced and what he had only dreamed—all had gone to pieces and now formed one confused wreck within him. At such awful moments the friend who comes to help stands petrified, and it is a mercy when the senses of him who has been thus smitten forsake him.

Days of openly confessed pain followed, ever returning and designedly renewed by himself; but we may look on these as a merciful gift of nature. At such times Wilhelm had not quite lost his darling; his pain was made up of unwearied and ever fresh endeavours to hold fast the happiness that had taken flight, to seize a possibility of regaining it at least in idea, and of raising his dead joy to a short after-life. We cannot call a body perfectly dead so long as the process of dissolution is going on, and its forces endeavouring in vain to fulfil their former destiny are wearing themselves away by destroying the very members to which they once gave life; it is only when every part has wrought out its own destruction, by destroying the rest, and we see the whole lying before us decomposed into cold indifferent dust, that we feel the wretchedly empty sensation of real death—death which nothing can requicken but the breath of the ever-living God.

In such a new, unimpaired, sweet mind and temper as Wilhelm's there was much to be torn, destroyed and killed, and his great agony was only nourished and embittered by the healing power which dwells in youth. His entire existence had been struck at its very root. Werner, who became his confidant because there was no one else to fill the place, rushed eagerly to the work of slaying what he considered a hateful passion and a monster

with fire and sword. The opportunity was too favourable to be lost, there was so much evidence at hand, there were tales and stories too that he knew so well how to use. Indeed he went to work step by step with so much eagerness and cruelty, not leaving his friend the comfort of one small momentary illusion, and shutting up so carefully every corner in which Wilhelm could have taken refuge from his utter despair, that Nature, unwilling to see her favourite totally ruined, sent an illness to relieve him from this over-pressure.

A violent fever, with its usual consequences—medicines, an overstrained frame and exhaustion, kind efforts to relieve on the part of his family, and the love of brothers and sisters which only comes thoroughly home to us in the day of want and adversity—these were diversions in his present altered circumstances and formed a scanty entertainment. Not till he was recovering, that is, not until his strength was exhausted, did he gaze into a fearful abyss of barren wretchedness, somewhat as men gaze down into the hollow, burnt-out crater of a volcano.

He then began to reproach himself most bitterly for being able to pass a single moment of ease indifference or calm after the loss he had sustained. He despised his own heart and longed for the relief of lamentation and weeping.

In order to re-awaken these he went through all the scenes of his former happiness in imagination, painting them in the most vivid colours, striving to fancy himself once more in their midst, and then, after working himself up to the highest possible point, so that his frame felt quickened and his bosom seemed to throb under the sunshine of former days, he would look round at the fearful precipice behind him, refresh his sight once n

by gazing on its fearfully destructive depths, fling himself down into it and force his nature to the bitterest agonies. He lacerated himself repeatedly in this cruel fashion, for youth in the richness of its undeveloped powers has but little idea what it squanders by thus adding artificial sufferings to the pain naturally caused by a loss, as if by these means only the worth of the lost blessing could be correctly estimated.

So convinced too was Wilhelm that this was the only loss—the first and last—that he could ever feel, that he turned in disgust from every attempt at comfort which was founded on the idea that his sufferings could one day have an end.

CHAPTER II.

HAVING in this way accustomed himself to self-torment, he went on to attack with malicious criticism, and from every point of view, what still remained his own, and what, next to and in concert with his love, had given him the most pleasure and the highest hopes; namely his talent for poetry and acting. He refused to see anything in his own writings but an insipid imitation of the usual forms, destitute of intrinsic worth; stiff school-boy essays without a spark of humour truth or enthusiasm. His poems he looked upon as mere monotonous pieces of metre, in which very ordinary thoughts and feelings dragged themselves wearily along, only just held together by a poverty-stricken rhyme. In this way he robbed himself of every prospect, every wish which could have afforded him consolation from this quarter.

It fared no better with his talent for the stage. He was angry with himself for not having earlier discovered

the vanity which lay at the root of all his pretensions; he ridiculed his figure, walk, gestures and declamation, positively refusing to allow in himself the slightest talent or merit which could raise him above mediocrity. By these means he increased his silent despair to the highest pitch; for, hard as it is to renounce a woman's love, it is not less painful to break off all communion with the Muses, to declare ourselves unworthy of their fellowship and to forego the most delightful and most immediate kind of applause that can ever be publicly given to our person, deportment or voice.

While resigning himself thus entirely to his fate, our friend devoted his energies zealously to business. His friend Werner was astonished and his father perfectly satisfied to find that no one was more active in the office, on the exchange, in the shop or the warehouse; that correspondence, accounts, in fact whatever was entrusted to his care, was executed with the greatest diligence and zeal. Not indeed with that cheerful industry which to the worker who has performed his task with method and success is its own and immediate reward; but with that quiet diligence inspired by duty, sustained by conviction and rewarded by conscience, which yet even at the moment when it is being crowned by the most delightful consciousness of well-doing, finds it difficult to choke back an obtrusive sigh.

In this busy kind of life some time had passed, and Wilhelm had convinced himself that this severe trial had been intended by Fate for his good. He felt glad that though the warning had been a rough one it had been sent him early on his road through life, and that he had not been left as were so many to atone later and more bitterly for mistakes caused by ignorance and caprice in early youth. For in general a man holds out as long

as he can before dismissing the fool he has been cherishing at his heart, confessing a capital error, or consenting to acknowledge a truth which he knows will drive him to despair.

Resolved as Wilhelm was to renounce his dearest ideas some time had still to pass before he was fully convinced of his misfortune. At last however, by means of cogent arguments, he had so entirely destroyed every hope of love, and all belief in his own powers of poetical production or personal representation, that he summoned courage enough to begin the work of cancelling every trace of his folly and destroying every trifle that could bring it to his recollection. For this purpose he lighted a fire on his hearth one cool evening and took out a little box which had served as a reliquary for hundreds of trifles either given him by Mariana at important moments or stolen from her by himself. Every faded flower reminded him of the day when it was fresh and blooming in her hair, each little note recalled the happy hour with her to which it had invited him, every bow of ribbon brought back the recollection of her lovely bosom, his favourite resting-place. Was it possible that he could see these things without rousing into life again every feeling that he fancied he had killed long ago? without, by the very presence of these trifles, restoring to its former power the passion over which, in the absence of her he loved, he had gained control? We do not feel the full dreariness of a dull day until one piercing ray of sunshine shows us how cheerful the bright weather was.

It was thus natural that Wilhelm could not see these loved and long-treasured relics perishing one by one before his eyes in flame and smoke without agitation. Sometimes he stopped lingeringly over his work, and he had still one string of beads and a little gauze hand-

kerchief left, when he made up his mind to feed the dying flames with his own early poetical effusions.

Up to that time he had carefully preserved all he had ever written since his mind first began to develop. His writings still lay tied up in a bundle at the bottom of his trunk just as he had put them in to take with him on his intended flight. What a wide difference lay for him in that tying-up and this opening!

A strange sensation seizes us on opening a letter which we wrote, sealed and sent off to a friend some time before and under certain circumstances, but which instead of reaching him has been returned to us. We break our own seal and converse with our altered self as with some third person. A similar feeling to this possessed Wilhelm strongly on opening the first packet. He threw the separate leaves into the fire; just as its flames were blazing up fiercely, Werner came in and seeing the blaze, asked what was going on.

"I'm proving that I am in earnest," said Wilhelm, "in giving up a trade that I was never born to;" and with these words he threw the second packet into the fire. Werner tried to prevent him, but it was done.

"I don't understand your going to such extremes," he said. "These writings may not have been first-rate, but I don't see why they should be destroyed."

"Because, if a poem is not first-rate, it ought not to exist: because no man who is unable to turn out the best work has a right to meddle with art at all, and should guard himself most earnestly against any temptation to do so. We all have a certain vague longing to imitate what we see; but this longing does not pre-suppose power to bring what we undertake to perfection. Why if a rope-dancer has been in the town, look how all the boys begin to run up and down every plank and

balance themselves on every beam they can find until some other play takes their fancy. Haven't you noticed this among our own friends? If a first-rate musical performer gives an entertainment, one or other of them always begins to learn the same instrument. Happy the man who soonest finds out the fallacy of measuring his powers by his wishes!"

Werner contradicted this, the conversation grew animated, and Wilhelm could not use against his friend the same arguments with which he had so often tormented himself without emotion. Werner maintained that it was unwise to abandon a talent for which a man had both inclination and fitness, only because he did not feel able to practise it in its greatest perfection. There were, he said, so many leisure hours that might be filled up in this way, and by degrees much might be produced that would prove a pleasure to ourselves and others.

Wilhelm, however, was of quite a different opinion, and interrupted him at once eagerly, saying: "My dear friend, you make a great mistake in believing that a work the first conception of which ought to fill its author's whole soul can be produced in broken scraps of time stolen avariciously from other employments. No, a poet must live wholly for himself and his favourite subjects of contemplation. He has received Heaven's costliest inward gifts, he guards within himself a treasure containing the power of perpetual increase and multiplication, and with these precious things he must live undisturbed from without—live in that calm quiet bliss, which rich men try in vain to produce around them by heaping up possessions. Look how eagerly men run after fortune and pleasure! their wishes, their efforts, their money are all employed in a ceaseless pursuit—and a pursuit of what? Why of the very things that the poet has

received from nature: enjoyment of the world we live in, an inward understanding of and sympathy with others through himself, and a power of harmonious co-existence with things that are often irreconcilable and incompatible.

“What causes men to live in so much disquiet and unrest but that they cannot force their own ideas into harmony with existing realities? that enjoyment slips away when already in their grasp? that what they wish for comes too late, and what they really do attain fails to produce the impression on their feelings which their eager desires led them to believe it would when yet far off. Now Fate has raised the poet above all this as if he were a god. He watches the confused mass of human passions, families, kingdoms in their aimless movements; he sees the insoluble problems created by human misunderstanding—problems which could so often be solved by a single word—occasioning unutterable and ruinous perplexities. He sympathises in all the joys and sorrows of men’s destinies. The man of the world may be allowing his days to steal away in consuming sorrow for some great loss, or he may be going to meet his destiny in the highest spirits; in either case the delicately-strung, sensitive soul of the poet will, like the ‘moving sun, pass on from night to day, and tune his harp by softest changes either to the joy or the sorrow.

“The beautiful flower of wisdom springs up in his heart; it is its native soil, and while others are passing their time in waking dreams, terrified out of their senses by all kinds of monstrous ideas he lives through the dream of life as one awake; to him the strangest occurrences are but parts of what has been and what will be. And thus the poet is teacher, prophet, friend of gods and men. Would you wish him to descend to

a miserable business? Would you wish a being who is formed to hover like a bird above this lower world, to make his nest on the summits of its mountains and the highest branches of its trees, to seek his nourishment from fruits and buds, skimming lightly from one twig to another—would you wish him to draw the plough like an ox, to hunt like a dog, or perhaps even to be chained up in a farm-yard to guard it by his bark?"

We can well understand Werner's astonishment at hearing this. "Yes," he said, interrupting him, "that would be all well enough if men were made like birds, so that they could pass their days in perpetual enjoyment without the labour of spinning or weaving, and then, when winter comes, betake themselves with ease to distant regions where they can be safe from cold and hunger."

"And the poets did live so," cried Wilhelm, "in times when honour was given where honour is due; and so they always ought to live. Completely furnished within they needed little from without; the gift of being able to impart to others beautiful feelings and glorious visions clothed in lovely words and sweet melodies which adapted themselves to every subject, has always thrown a spell over the world and proved a rich inheritance for the gifted ones. At king's courts, rich men's tables, and lovers' gates men listened to them eagerly, closing eye and ear to every thing else with the same feeling that forces us to stand still in ecstasy, feeling ourselves most fortunate when the song of a nightingale bursts forth from the thicket in which we are wandering and thrills us by its tenderness and power. They came to a world that showed them hospitality, and the apparent lowness of their outward condition only served to raise them the higher. Heroes listened to their

songs, and the conquerors of the world paid homage to the poets without whose verses their own portentous existences must have passed away like whirlwinds. Lovers wished that both anticipation and enjoyment might be as multiplied and harmonious as they sounded in the descriptions uttered by those inspired lips, and even rich men never felt their idolised possessions so valuable as when seen in the bright light shed on them by minds that acknowledged and exalted all real worth. Indeed, if you will, who else but the poets formed the gods themselves, raised us to them, and brought them down to us?"

After thinking a few moments, Werner answered: "I have often felt distressed to see you making such violent efforts to banish from your mind what you still feel so vividly. I am much mistaken if it would not be a wiser course to yield in some measure to your inclinations instead of wearing yourself out by the contradictions of this stern self-denial, and with this one innocent pleasure renouncing all the rest."

"I hardly like to tell you," said Wilhelm, "for I am afraid you will find it absurd, but I confess that much as I try to flee from these visions they haunt me perpetually, and when I look into my own heart all the old wishes have as firm a hold as ever. What else is left now for such an unfortunate man? Ah, I was stretching out my arms towards the Infinite; I had a sure hope of grasping something really great; any one who had foretold how soon those arms would be crushed and hang down helplessly would have driven me to despair. And now that sentence has been passed upon me—now that I have lost her who stood in the place of a divinity to lead me to the accomplishment of my wishes, what can I do but give myself up to the bitterest grief? Oh, my

brother," he went on, "I will not deny that, in all my secret plans, she was like the pivot to which the rope-ladder is fixed. The adventurer is already suspended in the air, he is full of hope in the midst of danger; the iron breaks, and there he lies, dashed to pieces at the foot of his own wishes. There is no more hope or comfort for me now;" and then, exclaiming, "I won't leave one of those miserable papers undestroyed," he sprang up, seized a few more of the manuscripts, tore them in half, and dashed them into the fire. Werner tried in vain to stop him. "Don't hinder me," he exclaimed, "of what use are these miserable pages? For me they have lost all value as foundation or encouragement for the future, and am I to keep them only to be my torment so long as I live? Or shall they be left to serve the world for a laughing-stock some day, instead of moving men to feel pity and awe? Woe is me and my fate! Now I understand the laments of the poets—of the men who learnt wisdom by adversity. I believed myself invulnerable, unassailable, and now alas, I see well that a deep early wound can never be quite healed; the scar will always be there; I feel that I shall carry it with me to the grave. No, though it kill me at last, that pain shall not leave me for one single day. Neither shall *she* be forgotten; her memory shall live and die with me—the memory of that unworthy girl—and yet—O, my friend, if I were to say what I really feel, surely not quite unworthy. Her position and her lot in life were a thousand excuses for her. I was too cruel. And you in your coldness and severity, told me too much; you had no mercy, you held my poor distracted senses prisoners and prevented me from doing what I ought to have done both for her and myself—what was really due to us both. Who knows into what a condition I may have brought her? I did

not feel it so much at first, but now the utter helplessness and despair in which I left her weighs more and more heavily on my conscience. Isn't it possible that she might have excused herself? Is it impossible? How often has the world been misled by a mere misunderstanding? how many circumstances there always are to plead forgiveness for the greatest faults! I often fancy I see her sitting alone and silent, her face buried in her hands: 'This is the faith and love he vowed me,' she says to herself, 'with one rude stroke he ends the happy life that bound us together!'" He threw himself on the table with his face on the papers and burst into a flood of tears.

Werner stood by in the greatest perplexity. He had not suspected that Wilhelm's passion would flash out again so suddenly. He tried to interrupt or turn the conversation, but the stream was too strong for him. Then patient steadfast friendship returned once more to her old office, and by his silent presence while this violent attack of pain lasted he gave a proof of sincere, pure sympathy. Thus they passed the evening; Wilhelm absorbed in this return of his pain, and Werner frightened at the fresh outbreak of a passion which he thought he had mastered and overcome long ago by dint of good advice and earnest exhortations.

CHAPTER III.

AFTER such relapses Wilhelm generally devoted himself more earnestly to business and was more active than ever: it was the best way of avoiding the labyrinth which was always tempting him to re-enter it. His pleasant manner towards strangers and the ease with which he could

correspond in nearly every modern language gave his father and his father's business friends increased hopes, and consoled them for the interruption to their plans occasioned by his illness, of the cause of which however they knew nothing. His journey was therefore resolved upon for the second time, and now we find him seated on horseback, his knapsack behind him, refreshed and cheered by fresh air and exercise and riding towards a mountainous part of the country where he had some commissions to execute.

The sensation produced by riding slowly across the hills and valleys was exceedingly pleasant to him. This was the first time that he had ever really seen overhanging rocks, rushing waterfalls, and deep ravines clothed with moss and plants; but he had had visions of such places in his youthful dreams. He felt younger while looking at them; all the pain he had suffered seemed washed away out of his soul, and with perfect cheerfulness he began to repeat aloud quotations from different poems, (especially from Pastor Fido) which crowded into his mind in these lonely regions. He remembered too a good many passages from his own songs, and recited them with especial satisfaction. He peopled the world around him with all kinds of forms from the past and every step into the future seemed fraught with prospects of important transactions and remarkable events.

Sometimes his quiet meditations were broken in upon by numerous foot-passengers who on coming up with him passed with a silent salutation and took their way up the steep footpaths into the hills; they however attracted his attention very little. At last a talkative companion joined him and began to explain the reason of this numerous pilgrimage. "A play," he said, "is to be acted this

evening at Hochdorf, and the whole neighbourhood is coming together to see it."

"What!" exclaimed Wilhelm, "has the drama found a way through these impenetrable woods and built her temple among these lonely hills? And is it my fate to be a pilgrim to her festival?"

"You will be still more surprised," said his companion, "when you hear who the actors are. There is a large factory in the place which supports a great many people. The manufacturer, living as we may say almost entirely separated from all human fellowship, knows no better way of occupying his work-people in winter than by encouraging them to act plays. Cards he forbids, and is very anxious to put down coarse, barbarous habits among them. They therefore spend the long evenings in this way, and as to-day is the old man's birthday an especial entertainment is to be given in his honour."

On reaching Hochdorf where he was to pass the night Wilhelm stopped at the factory, the manufacturer's name being down on his list as a debtor.

On giving his name, the old man exclaimed in astonishment: "What, are you the son of that excellent man to whom I owe so many thanks, aye, and money too? Your father has been so patient with me that I should be a very bad fellow indeed, if I did not pay him at once and with the greatest pleasure. You have come just at the right time to see that I am in earnest."

He called his wife; she seemed quite as pleased to see the young man as her husband had been, declared he was very like his father and regretted that, owing to the great number of strangers, she could not give him a night's lodging under her roof.

The business matter was simple, and quickly arranged; Wilhelm put a small roll of gold pieces into his pocket and wished that all his other commissions might give him as little trouble.

It was nearly time for the play to begin. The only guest still to be waited for was the warden of the woods and forests, who came at last, however accompanied by some huntsmen, and was received with the greatest respect.

A barn close to the garden had been fitted up as a theatre, and the whole company was conducted thither. There were no signs of remarkable taste, but both house and theatre had been gaily and prettily arranged. One of the painters in the factory had formerly been assistant at the theatre in the capital and had now furnished scenery representing a wood, a street, and a room, though in somewhat rude style. They had borrowed the piece from a company of strolling players and clipped it to their own fancy. As it was, it was entertaining. The plot consisted of two lovers trying to carry off a girl first from her guardian and then from each other and gave rise to plenty of interesting incidents. It was a long time since our friend had seen a play, and it made him think. There was abundance of action, though no true representation of character. Yet it pleased the audience and even delighted them. Such are the beginnings of all dramatic art. A perfectly un-instructed man is contented if he can only see something taking place before his eyes; an educated man likes to have his feelings moved, but only the really cultivated mind finds pleasure in reflection.

Wilhelm would have liked now and then to help the actors; there was so little wanting to have made them so much better.

His meditations were disturbed by the continually increasing smell of tobacco-smoke.

Soon after the piece had begun the warden had lighted his pipe, and by degrees many of the audience ventured on the same liberty. This gentleman's large dogs, too, occasioned great disturbances. They had been shut out, but they soon found their way in at the back door, rushed on to the stage, ran against the players, and at last bounded clean over the orchestra to their master who had taken the front place in the pit.

In the after-piece an offering was presented. On an altar stood a portrait of the old gentleman in his bridegroom's dress, hung with wreaths. All the actors were grouped around paying their homage in submissive attitudes. The youngest child then came forward, dressed in white, and recited some verses which moved the whole family to tears; even the warden, reminded by this scene of his own children, could not restrain his feelings. With this the play concluded, and Wilhelm could not resist going on to the stage to look at the actresses more nearly, praise their performance and give them some advice for the future.

The rest of our friend's business-commissions in the larger and smaller towns and villages among these mountains were all accomplished by degrees, but not all with so much success and pleasure as his first. Many of his debtors asked for some delay, some were rude, and others even disowned their obligations. As he had been charged in such cases to summon the offenders, he had to find a lawyer, give him instructions, appear himself before the magistrate, and go through all the other annoyances which appertain to law proceedings.

He fared no better when people wished to show him honour; there were so few who could give him any real

information, or with whom he could hope to enter into a business connexion that promised to be profitable. Then unfortunately a succession of rainy days came on, and as a journey on horseback under such circumstances in those regions would have been attended with almost insurmountable difficulties, he thanked Heaven on finding himself once more near the flat and open country and seeing a cheerful little town lying in the sunshine at the foot of a mountain, in a beautiful and fertile plain by the side of a gently-flowing river. He had no business to transact in the town, but just for that very reason he determined to stop there for a day or two to rest and refresh not only himself but his horse, which had suffered a good deal from the bad roads.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE were merry, or at any rate noisy goings-on in the inn at the market-place where he put up his horse. A company of rope-dancers, tumblers, and mountebanks who possessed a "strong man," had just come in with their women and children, and were behaving in the most disorderly manner during their preparations for a public performance. They quarrelled by turns with the landlord and with each other; their brawls were intolerable enough, but their merriment was perfectly insupportable. Undecided whether to go or stay, Wilhelm stood in the gateway watching some workmen begin to put up the stage in the market-place.

A flower-girl came up and offered him her basket; he bought a pretty nosegay, tied it up afresh after his own fancy, and was surveying it with pleasure, when one of the windows of another inn on one side of the square

opened and the pretty figure of a woman appeared at it. Even in the distance he could see that her face was lively and cheerful and that her fair hair hung carelessly over her shoulders; she seemed to be looking at the stranger. A few minutes later a boy dressed in a short white jacket with a hair-dresser's apron tied round his waist came out of the same house, went up to Wilhelm, and making him a polite salutation, said, "The lady at that window has sent me to ask if you will give her some of your beautiful flowers." "They are all at her service," answered Wilhelm, giving the nimble little messenger his nosegay and at the same time bowing to the fair one who returned his courtesy in a friendly manner and left the window.

As he was going up to his room thinking over this pleasant adventure, a young creature, whether boy or girl he could not at first determine, came springing down the stairs and excited not only his attention but his wonder. The child was dressed in a short silk bodice with slashed Spanish sleeves, and long tight trousers with puffs. The dress was very becoming, and the long black hair was coiled about the head in wavy plaits and curls. He soon decided that it must be a girl, stopped her as she was passing him, and after wishing her a good-day, asked to whom she belonged, though he could easily see that she must be one of the dancing company. She threw a sharp, dark glance at him, released herself from his hold and ran into the kitchen without giving any answer.

On reaching the top of the stairs he found on the large landing two men who seemed to be practising fencing, or rather, trying their skill on each other. One evidently belonged to the rope-dancers, but the other looked less wild and barbarous. Wilhelm stood some

time watching them and found good reason for admiration. After a short time the black-bearded, sinewy combatant left the field of battle and the other politely offered his foil to Wilhelm.

"If you do not object to taking a pupil," answered Wilhelm, "I shall be very glad to have a few passes with you." They began; the stranger could fence far better than his new opponent, but he was polite enough to say that the difference only lay in want of practice, and in fact Wilhelm's fencing gave full proof that he had been taught by a thorough master in the art.

Their amusement was interrupted by a great din and disturbance. It was the motley troop below going out to advertise the town of their approaching performance and rouse the people's curiosity as to their powers and skill. A drummer went first, then came the leader of the troupe on horseback followed by a dancing-girl mounted on a similar raw-boned animal and holding a child before her dressed up in ribbons and spangles. The rest came after on foot, and some of them carried children on their shoulders perched in venturesome and romantic positions. Among these Wilhelm's notice was again caught by the sullen young girl with the black hair, whom he had met on the stairs.

Harlequin ran about among the thronging crowd in comical style, distributing bills of the entertainment accompanied by very intelligible jokes, such as kisses to the girls and slaps with his wooden sword to the boys, whereby he excited an unconquerable desire to make his nearer acquaintance.

In the printed bills the various accomplishments of the company were set forth and extolled, but more especially those of a certain Monsieur Narciss and Ma-

demoiselle Landrinette, who, as the principal performers, had had the wisdom not to appear in the procession, thereby increasing curiosity and giving themselves an appearance of greater superiority.

During the procession Wilhelm's fair neighbour had again appeared at her window, and he had not failed to ask information about her of his new acquaintance. The latter, to whom for the present we will give the name of Laertes, offered to take Wilhelm across to her. "She and I," he said with a smile, "are the wrecks of a company of players, which came to grief here a short time ago. The beauty of this place tempted us to stay here and spend what little cash we have saved in peace; meanwhile a friend has gone off to look out some fresh engagement for himself and us."

Laertes then took his new acquaintance over to Philine's inn, leaving him a moment at the door to buy some sweetmeats in a shop close by. "I'm sure," he said on returning, "that you will thank me for procuring you this agreeable acquaintance."

Philine came out of her room to meet them in tiny high-heeled slippers. She had thrown a black mantilla over a white negligé, the somewhat doubtful cleanliness of which gave her an easy, every-day appearance; and from beneath her short petticoats peeped the prettiest little feet in the world.

"You are very welcome, and I thank you for the beautiful flowers," she exclaimed, as with one hand she led Wilhelm into the room and with the other pressed her nosegay to her bosom. They were no sooner seated and had begun a conversation on indifferent subjects, to which she well understood how to give a charming turn, than Laertes poured a number of burnt almonds

into her lap. She began to eat them directly, exclaiming: "Look, what a child this young man is! he'll try to persuade you that I am fond of such things, while all the time it is he who cannot live without sweet-meats."

"We'd better confess," said Laertes, "that in this as in many other matters we are very glad to keep one another company. For instance," he went on, "it's most lovely weather to-day, why should not we take a drive, and have dinner at the mill?" "With the greatest pleasure," said Philine, "we must make a little diversion for our new acquaintance." Laertes ran off, (he never walked) and Wilhelm said he must go home too for a few moments to have his hair put in order as it was very untidy from the journey. "That you can do here," said Philine, and calling her little page, she obliged Wilhelm most politely to take off his coat, throw on her dressing-mantle and have his hair arranged in her presence. "We mustn't lose time," she said; "who knows how long we may all be able to remain together?"

The boy, more out of opposition and ill-will than awkwardness, did not perform his office well; he pulled Wilhelm's hair and seemed determined to be as long over him as possible. Philine reproved him once or twice, and at last pushed him away, sent him out of the room, and went on with his task herself. She curled our friend's hair very prettily and easily, but made no haste in doing it, finding first one thing and then another to alter in her work, during which her knees unavoidably touched his, and the flowers in her bosom came so near his lips that he was tempted to give them a kiss more than once.

When all was over and Wilhelm had removed the

powder from his forehead with a little toilet-knife, she said: "Put that into your pocket, and think of me when you use it." It was a pretty knife, the handle was of inlaid steel, and on it the pleasant words "Remember me." Wilhelm took it, thanked her and asked permission to give a present in return.

At last they were ready; Laertes came with the carriage and a merry drive began. Philine threw something to every beggar, always accompanying her alms with a merry, good-natured word.

They had scarcely reached the mill and ordered dinner when some music was heard in front of the house. The performers were a party of miners. Their voices were lively and clear-toned and they sang some pretty songs accompanied by the zither and triangle. A large crowd soon assembled round them and the company in the house nodded their approval from the windows, on perceiving which the men enlarged their circle as if in preparation for the performance of their most important piece. After a short pause one of them came forward with a pickaxe and began to represent the act of trenching the ground and opening a mine, accompanied in his work by a grave melody. This had not gone on long before a peasant came out from among the crowd and gave him to understand in dumb show that he was to take himself off. The spectators were greatly astonished at this, not perceiving, until he opened his mouth and began in a kind of recitative to find fault with the other for daring to meddle with his land, that he was a miner too, but disguised in a peasant's dress. The first man was not to be put out of countenance, but explained to the peasant that he had a right to begin digging there, at the same time enlightening him on the first principles of mining. The peasant, not under-

standing the technical terms, which were new to him, put all manner of absurd questions at which the spectators, who felt they knew better, broke out into a roar of laughter. The miner tried to instruct him, and showed how much he would be a gainer in the end if the subterranean treasures of the country were brought to the surface. The peasant, who had begun by threatening the miner with blows, allowed himself to be pacified by degrees and they parted friends, the miner leaving the field of battle with flying colours.

At dinner Wilhelm said: "That little dialogue shows how useful the theatre might be made to all classes, and how even the state might turn it to advantage, if all the doings, occupations and enterprises of men were represented on the stage from their really good and praiseworthy side, and from that point of view from which the state itself cannot but find them worthy of honour and protection. At present we only see the ridiculous side of human nature on the stage; a comedy-writer is a kind of malicious police-officer, always on the watch to detect the faults of his fellow-citizens, and happy when he can cast an aspersion on them. Surely it ought to be a pleasant work and worthy of a statesman, to note the natural influence exercised by different classes on each other and to guide any poet in his task who has humour enough for such work. I am convinced that very entertaining pieces might be thought out in this way, pieces that would not only be useful but at the same time merry and amusing."

"Well," said Laertes, "so far as I have been able to make any observations during my wanderings, there seems to be plenty of prohibiting, thwarting, and hindering, but nobody who knows how to command, assist, or reward. Every thing in the world is allowed to go on

until it becomes mischievous, and then governments are angry and begin to strike about them at random."

"Oh, don't talk to me about the state and statesmen," cried Philine; "I can never fancy them except with wigs on; and a wig always makes my fingers twitch. I do so long to pull it off the reverend gentleman's head, whoever he may be, dance about the room, and laugh at his baldness."

She cut the conversation short by singing some merry songs in a charming manner, and then urged them to drive back lest they should miss any of the rope-dancers' performances. She was excessively amusing on the way home and carried her generosity to the poor to such an extent that when all their money was used up she threw her straw-hat to a poor girl and her neck-handkerchief to an old woman.

She invited both her companions to her own apartments, saying that the performance could be much better seen there than from the windows of the other inn.

They found the stage already prepared. Carpets had been hung up to form a pretty back-ground, the spring-boards were in their place, the slack-rope fastened to the posts and the tight rope drawn over the trestles. The square was nearly filled with common people, and the windows with spectators of a different class.

The clown drew the attention of the crowd and put them in a good humour by a series of absurdities which are generally successful in producing laughter. Some children whose limbs exhibited the strangest dislocations excited by turns the wonder and horror of the crowd; and Wilhelm could not resist a feeling of the deepest sympathy when he saw the child who had so attracted him at the first glance putting herself with difficulty into

the required postures. Then came the merry tumblers and delighted every one, turning head over heels in the air first one at a time, then in rapid succession and at last all together. Loud shouts and clapping of hands resounded from the entire multitude.

Their attention was then drawn to something quite different. All the children, one after another, were obliged to tread the rope, the novices first, as by practising their exercises the performance was lengthened and the great difficulties of the art brought to light. A few men and grown-up girls then took their turn, and showed a very fair facility, but still Monsieur Narciss and Mademoiselle Landrinette did not appear.

At last these two personages emerged from a kind of tent concealed by red curtains and their pleasing appearance and elegant dresses fully realised the hopes of the expectant crowd. He was an agile, vigorous lad of middle height, with black eyes and a famous head of hair; and she by no means inferior in strength or figure. They balanced themselves by turns on the tight rope with such ease, leapt and fell into such remarkable attitudes; she was so agile, he so daring and both so accurate in their movements, that the admiration of the crowd rose with every step and spring. Then their distinguished manners, and the pains and attention bestowed on them by the others gave rise to the idea that they must be lord and mistress of the entire company, a rank of which every one held them to be worthy.

The enthusiasm below spread to the spectators at the windows; the ladies never withdrew their gaze from Narciss, nor the gentlemen from Landrinette. The crowd shouted, even the gentlefolks could not refrain from clapping their hands, the poor clown could hardly draw a laugh, and very few were seen to steal away when some

of the performers pressed through the crowd with tin plates to collect money.

"They've done very well, it seems to me," said Wilhelm to Philine, who was reclining in the window, near him. "I admire their good sense in making everything, even the smallest feats, tell, by producing them one by one, just at the right moment, and so combining the children's want of dexterity and the perfect performances of their best players as to form a whole, which first secures our attention and then entertains us most agreeably."

Philine and Laertes had begun a bantering discussion about the appearance and performances of Narciss and Landrinette, during which the crowd had dispersed and the square was now nearly empty. Wilhelm saw the strange child standing by some other children who were at play in the street; he showed her to Philine, who, in her usual impulsive fashion, began to beckon and call to the child to come up, and finding this useless, ran singing down the stairs, her little slippers tapping as she went, and fetched her.

"Here is the riddle," she said, drawing the child into the room. The little girl, however, stopped short at the threshold, as if with the intention of slipping away again directly, and laying her right hand on her breast and her left on her forehead, made a low bow. "Don't be afraid, my child," said Wilhelm, going up to her. She looked at him doubtingly and came a few steps nearer.

"What is your name?" he said.

"They call me Mignon."

"How old are you?"

"No one has ever reckoned."

"Who was your father?"

"The great devil is dead."

"Well, this is odd enough," exclaimed Philine. They asked her a few more questions, and she answered in broken German with a curious gravity, laying one hand on her forehead and the other on her breast and bowing low at every answer.

† Wilhelm could not tire of gazing at the child. The mysterious circumstances that surrounded this little being possessed an irresistible attraction both for his eyes and heart. Her age he guessed to be between twelve and thirteen; she was well-made, but her limbs seemed either to promise that she would become stouter and taller or to indicate that her growth had been stunted. Her features, though irregular, were striking; the forehead full of mystery, the nose remarkably beautiful, and the mouth, though too reserved for her age, and sometimes spoilt by a twitch which drew the lips on one side, charming in the simple-hearted truth of its expression. Her dark complexion could scarcely be recognised through the paint. This little figure made a deep impression on Wilhelm; he gazed on her without speaking and seemed quite to forget the others who were present so absorbed was he in his own thoughts.

Philine roused him from his dream by giving the child some sugar plums that had been left over and signing to her to go. She made another bow and fled with the speed of lightning.

Before our new acquaintances separated for the evening, they agreed to take another drive on the following day and planned to dine out again, though at a fresh place; a hunting-lodge in a neighbouring wood was fixed upon. Wilhelm said a good deal in praise of Philine that evening but was answered in a very brief and thoughtless fashion by Laertes,

The next morning they practised fencing for an hour and then went across to Philine's hotel where they had seen the carriage ordered for their drive draw up. But what was Wilhelm's astonishment to find the carriage gone and Philine too! They were told that she had driven off with some strangers who had arrived that morning. Wilhelm had promised himself much pleasure in her society, and could not disguise his annoyance, but Laertes laughed and said: "Now that pleases me; it's exactly like her. At any rate, we'll go straight to the hunting-lodge; wherever she may be we won't give up our walk for her sake."

On their way Wilhelm continued to find fault with what he called the inconsistency of such behaviour, but Laertes said: "I cannot call any one inconsistent who remains true to her own character. Her plans and promises are never made without one unspoken condition: namely, that when the time comes it is agreeable to her to fulfil them. She is very fond too of giving presents, but no one must be surprised if she asks for them back again."

"A strange character," said Wilhelm.

"On the contrary, a very common one," answered Laertes, "only that she is no hypocrite. Just for this reason I like her; indeed, I am her friend because she is such perfect type of that sex which I have such good reason to hate. For me she is the true Eve, the mother of womankind; they are all alike, only they won't allow it."

They went on talking until they reached the wood. Laertes seizing many opportunities of expressing his hatred towards women but giving no reason for the feeling. Wilhelm entered it sad and out of spirits; for

several of Laertes' remarks had revived the memory of his relation to Mariana, and there, sitting alone at a stone table under some magnificent old trees and not far from a shady spring, they found Philine. She greeted them with a merry song to meet them, and on Laertes asking where her new friends were, answered: "Oh, I have served them a famous trick; just what they deserved. I put their generosity to the test on the drive, and when I found that they belonged to a close-fisted, greedy race, I determined they should have their punishment. On our arrival I asked the waiter what was to be had. Of course, with a waiter's usual volubility he ran over a long list of things, including a good many more than were really there. I saw their perplexity. They looked at one another, stammered, and asked the prices. 'Why do you hesitate so long?' I said; 'it's a woman's place to order dinner, leave that to me,' and therewith began to order the most insanely extravagant meal for which a number of things would have to be fetched from the neighbourhood. A few side-glances had put the waiter into my secret, and our united description of this splendid dinner so terrified them that they resolved on taking a walk in the wood from which I am very much mistaken if they ever come back. I have been laughing at them by myself for a quarter of an hour, and I'm sure I shall always laugh when I think of their faces at that moment." At dinner she reminded Laertes of other similar cases, and they went on telling merry stories of misunderstandings, hoaxes and the like.

A young man whom they knew in the town came softly stealing through the wood with a book sat down by them and began to discourse on the beauties of the spot, the murmuring brook, the waving branches, the falling lights and shadows and the singing of the birds.

Philine sang a little song about the cuckoo; this did not seem to please him and he departed.

“Defend me from all this talk about nature and natural scenery,” she cried, when he was gone. “There’s nothing more unbearable than such a reckoning-up of the pleasure one is enjoying. We go for a walk when the weather is fine just as we dance when the music strikes up, but who wants to think about the music or the weather? It’s your partner that interests you, not the violin; and to look into a pair of beautiful black eyes is wonderfully pleasant for a pair of blue ones. What are springs fountains and old decayed lime-trees when compared with that?” and as she said this she gave Wilhelm, who was seated opposite, a look which he could not prevent from penetrating at least as far as the entrance-gates of his heart.

He was a little embarrassed as he answered. “Yes, you are right; to human beings their fellow-men must be the most interesting subject; perhaps indeed, they ought to be the only one. Every thing else round us is either only the element in which we live or the tool with which we accomplish our purposes, and the more we dwell upon such things and the deeper our interest in them, the fainter grows the consciousness of our own worth as men and our wish for the society of others. Men who set a high value on their gardens, houses, dress, ornaments or whatever else they happen to possess, are not so sociable and agreeable; they lose sight of their fellow-men, and, indeed, how few on the whole possess the gift of drawing men together and making them happy! How one notices this too on the stage! a good actor can make us forget the poorest and most unsuitable scenery and decorations, but we never feel the

want of good players so keenly as when the theatre is splendidly fitted up."

After dinner Philine seated herself in the tall grass under the shady trees and told her friends to bring her all the flowers they could find. She made a beautiful wreath, put it on her own head, and looked indescribably charming in it. There were flowers enough left over to make another; she did so, Wilhelm and Laertes sitting by her the while. When it was finished amid jokes and fun of all kinds, she placed it gracefully on Wilhelm's head, arranging it two or three times till it suited her fancy.

"And so it seems I am to have nothing," said Laertes.

"By no means," answered Philine. "You shall have no cause to complain." And so saying she took off her own wreath and placed it on his head.

"Now, if we were rivals," said Laertes, "we should begin a violent dispute as to which of us stands best in your favour."

"You'd be great fools if you did," she answered, leaning over to him and putting up her mouth for a kiss; and then, the next moment, throwing her arm round Wilhelm, she pressed a hearty kiss on his lips too. "There," she cried drolly, "which tasted best?"

"Strange," said Laertes; "you would not fancy that such a thing could ever taste of wormwood."

"No," said Philine, "no more than any other gift that's enjoyed without envy and self-will. Now," she went on, "I should like to dance for an hour, and then I suppose we must go home and look after our tumblers."

They went into the house and found music already going on. Philine was a good dancer and put life into her two partners. Wilhelm was not awkward, but he wanted practice and instruction, and his two friends undertook to give him some lessons.

They reached home so late that the rope-dancers had begun their performance. Notwithstanding the crowd already assembled in the square our friends soon noticed that a disturbance of some remarkable kind had drawn a large number of people to the gate of the inn in which Wilhelm lodged. He ran across to see what was the matter and after forcing his way through the crowd, was horrified to perceive the master of the troupe dragging the child who had so interested him out of the house by her long hair and at the same time beating her poor little body unmercifully with a whip-handle.

He rushed on the man like a flash of lightning, and seized him by the collar. "Let that child go!" he cried like a madman, "or one of us dies on the spot;" and in the same moment, with a strength which only rage could have given him, he griped the fellow's throat so fiercely that in fear of suffocation the man let go the child and turned to defend himself. Some of the bystanders who though they pitied the child had feared to begin a quarrel, now pinioned and disarmed him with threats and abuse. Seeing himself reduced to his tongue as a means of defence, he began to pour out horrid threats and curses: the lazy good-for-nothing creature would not do her duty; she had refused to give the egg-dance which he had promised the public; he was determined to murder her and no one should hinder him. He tried to free himself that he might look for the child who had crept away and hidden herself among the crowd, but Wilhelm held him back, crying: "You shall not set eyes nor hands on that child until you have confessed before a court of justice where you stole her. I will push matters to the utmost extremity; you shall not escape me." Wilhelm uttered this speech in the vehemence of his anger without premeditation, prompted by a vague feeling, or, if

you like to call it so, an inspiration; but it put a sudden stop to the man's furious ravings and exclaiming, "What do I want with such a worthless creature? give me the cost of her clothes and you can have her; we'll settle that this very evening," he hurried back to continue the performance which had been interrupted by this scene and satisfy the public by displaying some extraordinarily wonderful feats.

Now that all was quiet, Wilhelm began to look for the child; she was nowhere to be found. Some said they had seen her in the garrets, others on the roofs of the neighbouring houses, but after searching every place in vain they were obliged to take the matter more calmly and wait to see whether she would not come back of her own accord.

Meanwhile Narciss had come in, and Wilhelm asked him for some information respecting Mignon's former and present life. On that matter he was quite ignorant, not having been long with the company himself, but was ready enough to tell his own history with much volubility and levity. To Wilhelm's congratulations on the great applause he had won from the public he seemed very indifferent. "We are accustomed to be laughed at and admired," he said, "but we are none the better for it. The manager pays us, and the success of the thing is his own look-out." So saying he took leave and was hurrying away: Wilhelm asked whither he was going in such a hurry; on which the boy confessed with a smile that his figure and talents had procured him a more substantial applause than that of the great public. He had received, in fact, messages from some ladies, desiring his nearer acquaintance, and had so many visits to make that he feared he should hardly get through them before midnight. He proceeded to relate his adventures with

the greatest frankness and was even on the point of giving names and addresses, but Wilhelm declined to receive such indiscreet confidences and courteously dismissed him.

Laertes meanwhile had been talking to Landrinette and pronounced her worthy of being and remaining a woman.

The negotiation for the child then came on. The violent black-bearded Italian agreed to renounce all claim on her for the sum of thirty thalers, but at the same time refused to reveal anything more respecting her parentage or history than that he had adopted her after the death of his brother who by reason of his extraordinary skill was called the Great Devil.

The greater part of the next morning was spent in looking for the child. Every corner of the house and neighbourhood was thoroughly searched, but she had vanished, and at last Wilhelm began to fear that she might have thrown herself into the water or taken her own life in some other way.

Even Philine's charms could not dissipate his uneasiness; the day was passed in sad speculations; and in the evening when the dancers and tumblers were exerting all their powers to please the public he could neither feel amused nor cheered.

The number of spectators was greatly increased by arrivals from the neighbouring districts, and the snow-ball of applause and admiration rolled on until it reached an enormous size. Immense sensation was excited by the leap over the swords and through the barrel with the paper bottom, and when the "strong man," supported only by two or three stools placed at small distances under his head and feet, allowed some sturdy blacksmiths to place an anvil on the arch thus formed by his

body and go through the entire process of forging a horse-shoe on it, the whole assembly was moved with fear, horror, and astonishment.

Neither had the so-called "Hercules' strength" been seen in that neighbourhood before. It consisted of a row of men bearing another row on their shoulders; on these again stood youths and women, and the whole formed a living pyramid surmounted by a child standing on its head like a pinnacle or weathercock. This formed a worthy conclusion to the entire spectacle. Narciss and Landrinette were carried through the principal streets of the town in chairs raised on the shoulders of the rest and greeted by the mob with loud shouts of joy. The people jostled one another to catch a full sight of their faces, and threw them ribbons, nosegays, and silk handkerchiefs. Everyone seemed to feel himself fortunate in being able to look at them and deemed worthy to receive a glance in return.

"Would not an actor, an author, or indeed any man whatever, feel himself at the very summit of his wishes, if by some noble word or good deed he could produce such a universal impression? These dancers have as it were electrified the people through their mere bodily skill. What a surpassingly delightful sensation it would be to diffuse right feelings—good, noble and worthy of humanity—with the same rapidity; to stir up such ecstasy, infuse into the multitude a human sympathy with all that concerns their fellow men, and so to represent happiness and misery, wisdom and folly,—nay, even nonsense and absurdity,—as to inflame and shake their stagnant minds and set them in free, pure, and active motion!"

Thus spoke our friend, and as neither Philine nor Laertes seemed in the mood to continue a such discourse,

he entertained himself with these favourite meditations alone, walking about the town till late into the night and giving his imagination full freedom to carry out in the most vivid manner his old wish: that all that is noble great and good might be represented on the stage in a form perceptible to the senses.

CHAPTER V.

THE rope-dancers' departure the next day was accompanied with much noise, and no sooner were they gone than Mignon immediately appeared. She came up as Wilhelm and Laertes were fencing in the large room.

"Where were you hidden?" said Wilhelm kindly; "you have given us a great deal of uneasiness."

The child looked at him, but made no answer.

"You belong to us now," said Laertes, "we have bought you."

"What did you pay?" said the child drily.

"A hundred ducats," answered Laertes, "and if you give them back again, you can be free."

"I suppose that is a great deal," answered the child.

"Oh yes," said Laertes, "you must be very good."

"I will be your servant," she answered.

From that moment she began to notice carefully what duties the waiter had to perform for the two friends, and after the first day would not allow him so much as to enter their room. She was determined to do every thing herself, and though slow and sometimes awkward, was most exact and careful.

She would often stand over a vessel of water and wash her face so diligently and eagerly as almost to rub the skin off. Laertes questioned and teased her until

he discovered that she was bent on getting rid of every trace of paint, and in her eagerness mistook the colour produced in her cheeks by this violent rubbing for the most obstinate rouge. On being told this she left off, and when the irritation had subsided her complexion proved to be a beautiful brown though seldom heightened by red.

Wilhelm was more entertained with Philine's frivolous charms and the mysterious presence of this child than he liked to confess even to himself, and he justified his conduct in his own eyes by great diligence in the practice of fencing and dancing, believing it unlikely that he should soon or easily find such another favourable opportunity for studying these two arts.

One day he was surprised, and in some measure pleased, to see Melina and his wife appear. Directly the first greetings were over they began to enquire for the directress and the rest of the performers, and were alarmed on hearing that the former had long ago left the place and the latter were nearly all dispersed.

Immediately after their marriage, in which as we know Wilhelm had lent a helping hand, the young couple had been to several places seeking an engagement; finding none they had at last been directed to this little town by some people whom they had met on their way and who professed to have seen a good theatre there.

Philine took no fancy to Madame Melina nor the lively Laertes to her husband. They longed to get rid of these new arrivals, and though Wilhelm assured them repeatedly that they were really very good people he could not produce an impression in their favour.

And in fact the merry life that our three adventurers had been leading hitherto was disturbed in more ways than one by this increase to their number. The new-

comers had found room in Philine's inn, and Melina began at once to bargain and complain about everything. He paid little and yet wanted better lodging, more abundant food, and more prompt attendance. Whereas the others, in their desire to lead a merry life, had been contented with everything and had paid quickly that they might not be reminded of what had been once consumed, Melina found fault with every meal, and canvassed it after it was over from beginning to end. Philine called him without any ceremony a ruminating animal and the landlord and waiters soon began to look sullen and out of humour.

But to the merry Philine Madame Melina was even more odious than her husband. She was not without education, but totally destitute of soul and genius. She could recite and declaim very fairly, and wanted to be always declaiming; but you soon discovered that it was a mere declamation of words in which certain passages were emphasized, and the sentiment of the whole—as a whole—left unexpressed. And yet she was seldom disliked, especially by men. On the contrary, those who were much with her pronounced her a woman of understanding, for she was what might be called a sentiment-borrower; she lived on other people's sentiments and opinions and made them her own. She could pay the most flattering attentions to any one whose good opinion was of importance to her, would enter into his ideas as long as she possibly could, and when they really rose above her horizon adopt them with ecstasy as new visions. She understood how to speak and how to be silent, and though her disposition was not malicious, she could watch very carefully for other peoples' weaknesses.

CHAPTER VI.

MELINA, meanwhile, had been looking up whatever fragments might have been left by the former company. The decorations and costumes had been put in pledge with certain brokers, and the manager, who in this case had been a woman, had empowered a notary to sell them under certain conditions if he should meet with customers. Melina wished to see them and induced Wilhelm to go with him. When the rooms were opened Wilhelm felt an affection for their contents which he did not even confess to himself. Stained and spoiled as were the decorations, dim and unpretending the robes for Turks and Pagans, the old caricature costumes for men and women, the cowls for magicians, priests, and Jews, he could not help feeling that the happiest moments of his life had been passed in the neighbourhood of just such frippery; and if Melina could have seen what was passing in his heart, he would certainly have seized the moment and urged him even more than he did to lay out some money in rescuing arranging, and reviving these scattered members into a beautiful whole. "What a happy man I should be," he exclaimed, "if I had only two hundred thalers to buy these stage necessaries and make a beginning. I would soon have such a little theatre together as, in this town and neighbourhood, would certainly bring in enough for our support." Wilhelm was silent and they both left the imprisoned treasures absorbed in thought.

From this time forward Melina's discourse was entirely taken up with plans and projects for fitting up a theatre and making it pay. He tried to interest Philine and

Laertes in the matter, and proposals were made to Wilhelm to advance money on security. But just at this juncture Wilhelm was seized for the first time with compunctions at having staid so long in the place; he excused himself and began to prepare for his further journey.

Mignon's little figure and all her ways continued to charm him more and more. There was a strange peculiarity in all the child's actions. She never walked up or down the stairs: she sprang. Sometimes she would climb up the balustrades of the galleries and in a moment, before you were aware, was to be seen perched on the top of some large wardrobe, where she would sit quiet for a time. Wilhelm noticed too that she had a different mode of salutation for every one. For some time past she had always crossed her arms over her breast when paying him her greeting. There were days on which she was quite silent; at times she would answer certain questions, yet always strangely, and so that no one could tell whether this strangeness proceeded from humour or from her ignorance of the language, as she spoke broken German interspersed with French and Italian words. She was unwearied in Wilhelm's service, and rose every day with the sun, but vanished early in the evening, slept in a little room on the bare floor, and would not be induced to accept of a bed, or even a straw mattress. He often found her washing herself, and her clothes were clean, though almost everything she had on was patched over and over again. Having been told that she went to mass very early every morning Wilhelm followed her one day, and found her kneeling in a corner of the church with her rosary, praying devoutly. She did not see him and he went home pondering over this little being, in no way able to solve the riddle it presented to his mind.

New solicitations on Melina's part for money to redeem the stage furniture and decorations of which we spoke before decided Wilhelm more and more to think seriously of leaving. His family had not heard from him for so long: he would write to them that very day. He accordingly began a letter to Werner, and had made some progress in a relation of his adventures which, unconsciously to himself, had already several times deviated from the strict truth, when to his annoyance he discovered on the other side of the paper some verses that he had begun to copy out of his note-book for Madame Melina. In his vexation he tore the sheet to pieces and put off his confessions until the next post-day.

CHAPTER VII.

OUR party was once more assembled and suddenly Philine who took notice of every horse or carriage that passed cried out: "Why there's our pedant! our delightful pedant! Who can those people be with him?" She began to call and beckon from the window, the carriage stopped and out of it stepped a poor miserable-looking fellow with just such a shabby greyish-brown coat and thread-bare nether garments as you would see on one of the poor schoolmasters who moulder away at our academies. He took off his hat to return Philine's salutation, and in so doing revealed a very stiffly curled but badly powdered periwig. Philine kissed her hand to him again and again.

One of her greatest pleasures consisted in liking and being liked by a certain number of men; but another, in which she indulged as often as possible, and which did not seem to afford her much less satisfaction, lay in

laughing at the rest who chanced to be out of her good graces at the time.

She made so much noise in welcoming this old friend that the elderly man and two girls who followed him out of the carriage were scarcely noticed by any one except Wilhelm. It struck him that he knew them, and indeed it soon turned out that a few years before he had often seen them in the company that had acted in his native town. The daughters had grown up since then, but the father was very little altered. He had usually acted the good-natured blustering old men, characters which will always haunt the German stage, and which indeed are often met with in everyday life. For ~~though~~ it is the character of our countrymen to do a great deal of good in a quiet unostentatious manner, they often forget that there is a graceful and agreeable way of doing the right thing, and urged by a spirit of contradiction easily fall into the error of representing their favourite virtue only by its contrast with their own surly, morose manner.

This actor performed such parts very well, and had given them so often and so exclusively that in his own daily life he had adopted something of the same manner.

When Wilhelm recognised this man he became exceedingly agitated. He remembered how often he had watched him on the stage by the side of his darling Mariana; he seemed to hear his scolding voice again, and then the coaxing tones with which she had had to meet his rough manner in many of the parts they had acted together.

The first eager question to the new-comers was whether there was any prospect or hope that engagements were to be had elsewhere. Alas, it was answered in the negative, and they were obliged to hear that wherever

enquiries had been made all the companies had already filled up their numbers, and some indeed were afraid that the impending war might oblige them to break up altogether. Induced by annoyance and love of change, our blustering old man had given up an advantageous engagement for himself and his two daughters, and meeting with the pedant, had in conjunction with him engaged a carriage to bring them hither, where they found to their sorrow that good advice was as dear and scarce as everywhere else.

While the rest were eagerly discussing their affairs, Wilhelm was thinking. He wanted to get the old man alone; wishing and yet fearing to hear something about Mariana; his mind was painfully anxious.

All the politenesses of the newly-arrived young damsels could not wake him from his reverie, but he was roused at last by the sound of angry words. They came from Friedrich, Philine's fair-haired page-boy, who was accustomed to wait on her, but now stoutly refused to prepare the table and bring in the dinner. "I engaged myself to be *your* servant," he said, "not to wait on everybody." They fell into a violent dispute; Philine insisted on the boy doing his duty, he obstinately refused, and at last she told him plainly he might go where he chose.

"Perhaps you think I cannot leave you!" he called out, and marching out of the room in a defiant fashion, packed up his bundle, and left the house. "Come, Mignon," said Philine, "get us what we want. Tell the waiter, and help him wait at table."

Mignon came up to Wilhelm, and said in her laconic way: "Shall I? May I?" and Wilhelm answered, "Do what Mademoiselle bids you, my child."

The child then arranged everything, and waited on

the guests most carefully all the evening. After dinner Wilhelm succeeded in getting a walk with the old man alone. After a number of enquiries as to how it had fared with himself, the conversation turned on the former company, and at last Wilhelm ventured to ask after Mariana.

"Don't talk to me about that detestable creature," he cried, "I've made a vow never to think of her again." Wilhelm was terrified at hearing such words, and his distress and perplexity increased when the old man went on to rail at her frivolity and dissolute conduct. What would he not have given to break off the conversation! but that was not possible now, and he was forced to bear the boisterous outpourings of this strange being.

"I'm ashamed that I could ever have taken such a fancy to her," he went on; "and yet I think if you had known her better you would have seen some excuse for me. She was so gentle, natural and kind, so obliging and agreeable in every sense; I never could have imagined that boldness and ingratitude were the chief features in her character."

Wilhelm had made up his mind to hear the worst, when suddenly to his astonishment the old man's tone grew milder, his words began to falter and at last he drew out his handkerchief to wipe away the tears which completely prevented him from speaking.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed Wilhelm. "What can have so completely changed your feelings in a moment? Pray don't hide anything from me, for I take more interest in the fate of this girl than you fancy. Only let me know everything."

"I've very little to tell," answered the old man, returning to his former stern, morose tone; "I can never forgive her all that she has made me suffer. She always

felt a certain confidence in me, and I loved her as if she were my own daughter. While my wife was alive I resolved to take her into our house and so save her from the hands of that old woman whose influence boded no good; but my wife died, and the plan came to nothing. Towards the end of our stay in your native town—not quite three years ago now—I noticed that she seemed sad and asked the reason; she made some evasive reply. At last we started on our journey. She and I were in the same carriage, and I noticed—what indeed she soon acknowledged—that she was going to have a child and was frightened lest the manager should dismiss her. It was not long before he did make the discovery, cancelled her agreement, which indeed only extended over a period of six weeks, paid what was due to her, and regardless of all remonstrances left her behind at a miserable inn in a little town.

“The devil take all such abandoned creatures!” he cried angrily, “and this one above all others for the many hours of my life that she has poisoned. But it’s of use to go on telling how I interested myself for her, what I did for her, how attached I was to her and how I provided for her even when she was absent. I’d rather throw my money into the next pond and spend my time in bringing up a pack of mangy dogs than waste thought or notice on such a creature again. Why what did she do? At first I got letters of acknowledgment and news of her from some of the places where she stayed, but at last she left off writing altogether and did not even thank me for the money I sent for her lying-in. Oh! the hypocrisy and fickleness of women are famously paired so as to give them a comfortable life and many a miserable hour to an honest fellow.”

CHAPTER VIII.

IMAGINE Wilhelm's state on reaching home after this conversation; all his old wounds torn open again, and the feeling that she had after all not been quite unworthy of his love, roused once more into life. For the old man's interest in her and the praise he was as it were forced to give her in spite of himself showed her in all her old loveliness and amiability. Even the irascible old man's violent accusations contained nothing that really lowered her in Wilhelm's eyes, for was not he himself the partner in her transgression? This he knew and acknowledged. Neither did her silence at the last seem to him blamable, but he grieved to think of her; he saw her on the sick bed, and then wandering about the world as a mother with a child—perhaps his own child—and no help near; these thoughts and visions made him acutely wretched.

Mignon was waiting for him; she lighted him upstairs to his room, and then setting down the candle, asked if he would allow her to perform one of her dances before him that evening.

He would have liked to decline, especially as he had no idea what it might prove to be, but he could not refuse this kind little creature anything. She departed and soon came back bringing a carpet under her arm; this she spread on the ground. Wilhelm allowed her to do what she liked. She then brought in four candles, and placed one at each corner of the carpet. After this she fetched a basket of eggs from below, and this threw some light on her intentions. She then began with measured steps to walk backwards and forwards on the carpet, laying down her eggs on it at fixed intervals, and when

this was finished called in one of the waiters who could play on the violin. He went into one corner of the room with his instrument; she tied a handkerchief over her eyes, made a sign to him, and then—like a piece of clockwork just wound up—began in the very same instant with the music a series of movements which she herself accompanied by striking a pair of castanets to the time and melody of the violin.

She was agile light rapid and exact in her dancing. So sharply and surely did she tread between the eggs and so close to them, that it seemed one or two at least would certainly be crushed by her foot or flung off in one of her rapid evolutions. Not at all! She did not even touch one, though in her windings amongst them she not only used every kind of step, but even leapt, and ended her dance by moving through their ranks in a half-kneeling posture.

Like a clock—without resting for an instant—she pursued her way; the dance swept on, repeating itself continually from the beginning, and receiving at each repetition a fresh impulse from the singular music by which it was accompanied. Wilhelm was quite carried away by the strange sight; he forgot the sorrow that lay on his mind, followed every movement of this little creature who was so dear to him, and was astonished to see how wonderfully, her character unfolded itself just in this dance.

She was stern exact frigid vehement, and in the softer movements and postures rather solemn than pleasing. At this moment he recognised what were the feelings he had always had for Mignon. He longed to give this little forsaken being a child's place in his heart, to take her to his arms, and with a father's love try to awaken within her some of the gladness of life.

The dance was over; she rolled the eggs gently with her feet into a little heap—not one was injured or forgotten. She then stationed herself beside them, took the handkerchief from her eyes and finished the performance with a bow.

Wilhelm thanked her for having in such a pretty unexpected way shown him the dance he had so much wished to see. He caressed her, said how sorry he was she should have had to exert and tire herself so much, and promised her a new dress, on which she exclaimed eagerly, "Of your colour." This too he promised her, though not quite clear what she meant by it. She then took up the eggs, rolled the carpet together under her arm, asked if he had any further commands, and passed out at the door.

The musician told him that she had given herself the trouble to sing him the dance-melody known as the Fandango until he could play it; and that she had offered him money which he had refused to take.

CHAPTER IX.

OUR friend passed a disturbed night; much of the time he could not sleep, and when he did was troubled by distressing dreams in which Mariana appeared to him, at times in all her beauty, at others in distress and poverty; he saw her one moment with a child in her arms, and the next bereaved. Morning had scarcely dawned when Mignon came in with a tailor. She was carrying some grey cloth and blue silk and explained in her own peculiar way that she should like to have a little vest and sailors' trousers such as she had seen the

boys in the town wear, but turned up with blue and tied with ribbons of the same colour.

Since he had lost Mariana, Wilhelm had quite left off bright colours. He had accustomed himself to grey, the garment of the shadows, at most enlivened by a light blue lining or a small blue collar. Mignon, in her eagerness to wear his colours, urged the tailor to make haste and he promised to send her dress home very soon.

The fencing and dancing lessons with Laertes this morning were not so successful as usual, and they were soon interrupted by the arrival of Melina; he came to acquaint them most circumstantially with the fact that they now formed a company sufficient to act plenty of pieces, and to renew his proposal that Wilhelm should advance some money towards their establishment as such. But the proposal found Wilhelm as undecided as ever.

Soon after Philine and the two girls came up, laughing and making a great deal of noise. They had planned a new excursion; they were always longing for change of place and scene and to dine every day in some fresh place was the summit of their desires. This time it was to be a water-party.

The boat which was to convey them down the bends of the pleasant river had been already engaged by the Pedant; Philine begged them to hurry, nobody loitered, and in a very short time they were on board.

"Well," said Philine, as soon as every one had taken his place on the seats, "what are we going to do now?"

"The speediest plan," said Laertes, "would be to extemporise a play. Let each of us take a part that suits his own character, and we'll try what we can make of it."

"That's a first-rate idea," said Wilhelm, "for in a

party where there is no attempt to dissemble, where each member shows himself exactly as he is and only follows his own inclinations, people soon become uneasy and discontented, and where there is nothing but dissimulation they are so from the first. It is not a bad plan to own to the deception from the beginning, and then behind our masks we can be as sincere as we like."

"Yes," said Laertes, "that is why the society of women is so agreeable; they never show themselves as they really are."

"Because," answered Madame Melina, "they are not, like men, conceited enough to imagine themselves sufficiently amiable and delightful as nature made them."

Meanwhile they were floating on between pleasant copses and pretty hills, gardens and vineyards, and the young women, more especially Melina's wife expressed themselves enchanted with the scenery. The latter, indeed, began solemnly to recite a pretty poem in the descriptive style written on a similar scene; but she was soon interrupted by Philine, who proposed that a law should be enacted forbidding any one even to mention an inanimate object, and was bent on carrying out the proposed scheme of extemporising a comedy. The blustering old gentleman was to be a half-pay officer, Laertes a fencing-master taking his holiday, the Pedant a Jew, and she herself a Tyrolese girl; the rest she left to choose their characters. They were to act as if they were total strangers to one another and had just met for the first time on a board market-boat.

She began at once to play her part with the Jew, and made them all merry.

They had not gone far when the boatman stopped, in order, (if permitted by the party) to take in another passenger who stood beckoning to them from the shore.

"Just what we want," said Philine. "Our travelling-party is not complete without one free passenger."

The man who now entered the boat was well-built and handsome; from his dress and demeanour you might have judged him to be a clergyman. He saluted the party; they in their own way acknowledged his salutation and informed him of the joke that was being carried on. He at once took the part of a country clergyman and acted it so well that they were all astonished and delighted. He admonished, told little stories, allowed occasional weaknesses to appear, and yet permitted no familiarity.

Meanwhile it had been agreed that every one who even once fell out of his character should pay a forfeit. Philine collected these forfeits very carefully, and though the pastor had not once been convicted of a misdemeanour she threatened him with abundance of kisses when the time for redeeming them should arrive. Melina, on the other hand, was completely plundered; Philine had taken his shirt-studs, buckles, and everything else about his dress that was moveable, for he had undertaken to act an English tourist and could not get into his part at all.

Thus the time passed most agreeably. They had all exerted their powers of imagination and humour to the utmost, and each had dressed up his part with amusing, pleasant jokes. At last they reached the place where they had intended to pass the day, and Wilhelm and the clergyman, (for so, both from his appearance and the part he had chosen, we must continue to call him), took a walk and entered into an interesting conversation.

"This seems to me," said the stranger, "a most useful training, not only for actors, but for friends and acquaintances. It is the best way of taking people out of

themselves and bringing them back by another and more circuitous route into themselves again. The custom of performing an unwritten play now and then ought to be introduced among every company of actors, and I feel confident that if such a piece were to be performed, say once a month, the public would be gainers; though, of course, in that case the actors must prepare beforehand by a course of rehearsals."

"It must not be imagined," said Wilhelm, "that by an extemporised piece is meant one composed on the spur of the moment. It is only the carrying-out that would be left to the actors, plan, plot and division of scenes having been given them."

"Quite right," answered the stranger, "and just by this mode of performance such a piece would gain immensely when the actors were once well set going. Not in the matter of language, for words are an ornament that can only be used by the superior author, but in gestures, looks, exclamations and matters of a like nature; in short, in that speechless or *sotto voce* acting which seems gradually to be dying out from amongst us. There must be actors in Germany whose bodies are channels for their thoughts and feelings,—who understand how to make silence, hesitation, looks signs and graceful tender movements means of preparation for the coming speech, and to unite the different parts of a conversation by filling up its pauses with agreeable pantomimic action; but such a course of practice as would assist these natural gifts and enable actors to maintain a rivalry with authors is not so much in vogue as for the sake of those who frequent the theatre we could wish it to be."

"But surely," said Wilhelm, "a gifted nature must be the first and last—indeed to me it seems all that can be really necessary to bring an actor, as it does every

other artist, (perhaps, indeed, we might say every human being,) to the high mark at which he aims."

"The first and last very likely it is and will remain,—the beginning and end;—but much will be lacking in the middle unless cultivation comes in to make the artist what he ought to be; and that cultivation must be given during his early life, for a man who possesses real genius is perhaps worse off than one who has only average capabilities; he can be more easily marred in the forming and driven into a false course than the other."

"But surely genius can save itself, can heal the wounds itself has made?" said Wilhelm.

"Not at all," answered the other, "or at least only in a miserable fashion. Let no one imagine that he can conquer early youthful impressions. A man who has been brought up in a praiseworthy amount of freedom, surrounded by beautiful and noble objects, and in constant intercourse with good and worthy men—whose masters have taught him first those things which ought to be known first in order to make what follows easier of comprehension—who has learnt what he will never need to unlearn, and whose early actions have been so guided that in later life he will be able to perform what is good and right with less difficulty and without having to break off old habits—will lead a purer more perfect and happier life than one whose youthful powers have been wasted in resistance and error. A great deal is written and said on education, and yet I see but very few men who are able to comprehend and carry out the simple but grand idea which includes all the rest."

"That may very likely be true," said Wilhelm, "for men are narrow-minded enough to wish others brought up after their own image. Happy therefore are those

whom Fate takes into her own hands and brings up in her own way."

"Ah," said the other with a smile, "Fate is a distinguished tutor, but a very expensive one. For my own part I would always rather trust to the reason of a human tutor. The instrument by which Fate works is Chance, and though I have the greatest respect for the former, the latter may often prove very awkward and unmanageable. At all events, it seldom seems to perform the decrees of Fate with precision and perfection."

"You seem to be expressing a very strange thought," answered Wilhelm,

"Not at all. Nearly everything that takes place in the world will justify my opinion. Do not numbers of occurrences begin with a great idea and finish in an absurdity?"

"Surely you are joking."

"Well," continued the other, "isn't it just the same with individual men? We'll suppose that Fate has destined some one to be a good actor—why shouldn't she provide us with good actors as well as with anything else?—but Chance takes him into a puppet-show while he is so young that he cannot help taking an interest in insipid and tasteless productions, finding folly endurable and perhaps even interesting; and thus those very impressions which never quite fade away and for which we always retain some affection come to him from a wrong quarter."

"What makes you think of puppet-shows?" said Wilhelm in dismay.

"The example was taken quite at random; if it does not please you we can choose another. Say that Fate had destined some one to be a great painter, but Chance was pleased to thrust him during his youth into dirty

huts, sheds, and barns. Do you think that man can ever rise to purity, nobility, freedom of soul? Just in proportion to the vigour with which his mind has seized on all this impurity and endeavoured in the best way he knew of to ennoble it will be the revenge of this same impure element later in his life; for while he has been trying to overcome it, it has knit itself together with his inmost being. Whoever has lived among bad and frivolous people when he was young, will always, even if in later life better society be within his reach, look back longingly to those times and people; for the impressions made then remain associated in his mind with youthful pleasures and happiness that very rarely repeats itself in life."

We can easily believe that such conversation as this dispersed the other members of the party one by one. Philine especially had taken her departure at the very first. Our two talkers now rejoined the rest by a by-path and Philine produced the forfeits. They had to be redeemed by all kinds of penalties, during which the stranger made himself most agreeable to the whole party, and especially to the ladies, by his charming inventions and genial interest in the matter. Thus they sang, laughed, jested, and kissed away the remaining hours of the day.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN the time came for returning home they looked round for their clergyman: he had vanished and was nowhere to be found.

"Well," said Madame Melina, "from his well-bred manner you would not have fancied he would leave a

party who had received him so kindly, without bidding them adieu."

"I have been thinking the whole time," said Laertes, "where it is that I can have seen this strange man before. I meant to have asked him about it before we parted."

"That was just my case too," said Wilhelm. "I certainly should not have let him go without making him tell us something, at least, about himself and his circumstances. I am very much mistaken if I have not spoken to him somewhere before."

"And yet after all you may both be mistaken," said Philine; "it is only that he looks like a *man* and not like Dick or Harry."

"What do you mean by that?" said Laertes, "don't we look like men too?"

"I know very well what I am saying," answered Philine; "if you don't understand me you can leave it alone. Surely I am not obliged to explain my words."

Two carriages drove up, and Laertes was praised for his forethought in ordering them. Philine took her seat next to Madame Melina and opposite to Wilhelm; the others arranged themselves as they best could and Laertes rode Wilhelm's horse which had been sent with the carriages.

Philine was scarcely seated before she began to sing some pretty songs and soon turned the conversation on to different stories which she thought might be turned into good plays. This clever move put Wilhelm into his best humour, and from his rich store of living pictures he at once composed a whole piece with all its acts, scenes, characters, and intrigues. They determined that

a few songs might be introduced with advantage; he soon composed them, and Philine, who entered into all his ideas, adapted well-known melodies and sang them off impromptu. It was one of her charming, beautiful days; she understood how to enliven our friend with all kinds of merry raillery, and it was long since he had felt so happy.

Since the cruel discovery which had torn him from Mariana, he had faithfully kept a vow to guard himself against the trap-like snares of a woman's embrace, to avoid that treacherous sex, and to hide all his pain his inclinations and his sweetest wishes in his own bosom. His conscientious observance of this vow had acted as a secret nourishment to his being, but as his heart was one that must sympathise with others, an affectionate communion with some one was just now a necessity to him. The haze of early youth seemed hovering over everything; he gazed on every attractive object with delight and joy, and never had his judgment of agreeable people been more lenient. How dangerous this saucy, audacious girl must have been to him in his present state of mind is unfortunately only too easy to see.

On reaching home they found Wilhelm's room prepared for company, the chairs set in order as if for a reading and the table pushed into the middle of the room in readiness for the punch-bowl.

The German chivalry plays were just then new, and very popular. The blustering old man had brought one with him, and the reading of it had already been resolved upon. The party took their seats; Wilhelm took up the copy and began to read.

The armed knights, the old castles, the open-hearted honesty, straightforwardness, and especially the inde-

pendence of the characters were received with great applause. The reader did his best and the audience were in ecstasies. Between the second and third acts a huge punch-bowl made its appearance, and as there was a great deal of drinking, giving of toasts and ringing of glasses in the piece, nothing could be more natural than that our party should place themselves most vividly in the position of the heroes and sound their glasses also to the healths of their favourites.

Every one felt fired by the noblest national feeling. It suited this party of German actors so thoroughly to entertain themselves in this poetical fashion in accordance with their own peculiar character and in their own domain. And then the vaults and dungeous, the ruined castles, the moss and hollow trees, and above all the gipsy scenes at night and the secret tribunals—all these produced an incredible effect. Every actor fancied himself in armour and helmet displaying his German nationality, and every actress had the same vision of herself in a huge ruff. They all wanted to appropriate names either from the piece or from old German history, and Madame Melina declared that the son or daughter she was expecting should be christened by no other name than Adelbert or Matilda. Towards the beginning of the fifth act the applause became louder and more stormy, and at last, when the hero escaped from his oppressor and the tyrant was punished, their rapture reached its highest pitch and all declared they had never spent such happy hours. Melina, inspired by the punch, was the loudest of all, and when the second bowl was emptied and they were close on midnight, Laertes solemnly swore that no human being was worthy ever again to touch these glasses with his lips, after which asseveration he dashed his own behind him through

the window-panes into the street. The rest followed his example, and notwithstanding the protestations of the landlord who had rushed in the punch-bowl too was broken into a thousand pieces, lest after such a festival it should ever be desecrated by unhallowed beverages. The two girls lay on the sofa in not the most becoming attitudes, and Philine, who was outwardly less affected by her revel than the rest, mischievously incited the others to greater noise and turbulence. Madame Melina recited sublime poems; her husband, who was not very amiable in his intoxication, began to abuse the punch, declaring that *he* could arrange such an entertainment much better, and becoming more and more violent the more Laertes bade him be quiet, the latter at last in a fit of exasperation threw the fragments of the broken bowl at his head, thereby considerably increasing the tumult.

Meanwhile the police had come up, and now demanded admission into the house. Wilhelm, who had taken very little but was heated from reading, found no small difficulty even with the landlord's help in pacifying the men by dint of money and fair words and getting the various members of the party home in their most doubtful condition. On returning to his room he threw himself dressed as he was on the bed, overpowered with sleep, dispirited and angry; and nothing could equal the unpleasant feeling with which, on opening his eyes the next morning, he gazed moodily on the devastation committed the evening before and the confusion disorder and bad effects which had been produced by a clever lively poem written with a good intention.

CHAPTER XI.

AFTER a few moment's thought he sent for the landlord and told him to put both the breakages and the punch down to his own account. At the same time he had the vexation of hearing that his horse had been so hardly ridden by Laertes the day before that it was probably what they call foundered, and the farrier feared would not recover.

A greeting nodded to him by Philine from her window restored his cheerfulness, and he went forthwith into the next shop to buy the little present he still owed her in return for the toilet-knife; but we must confess that he overstepped the limits of a proportionate return for that gift, as he not only bought a pair of pretty earrings, but a hat, neck-handkerchief and two or three trifles which he had seen her extravagantly throw away on the first day.

Madame Melina came on purpose to watch the presentation of these gifts, and took an opportunity as soon as she could—before dinner even—of remonstrating with him on his fancy for this girl. This astonished him all the more because he believed himself totally undeserving of such reproaches. He swore solemnly that, knowing her course of life so well as he did, the idea of paying her any attentions had never entered his head, and made all the excuses he could think of at the moment for his friendly manner towards her; but nothing availed to pacify Madame Melina. On the contrary her annoyance increased when she saw that the flatteries by which she had in some small degree obtained Wilhelm's liking for herself were not sufficient to secure it when attacked by a younger, livelier, and more gifted nature.

On sitting down to dinner her husband too was discovered to be in a very bad temper; he was just beginning to vent his anger over every little trifle when the landlord came in and announced a wandering harper. "I am sure the man's playing and singing will please you," he said; "people always admire his music and give him a trifle."

"Send him away," said Melina, "a vagrant musician is the last thing I am in the humour to hear just now; and then too we have singers in our own party who might perhaps like to earn something." This he said with a spiteful glance at Philine. She understood him, and to his annoyance immediately took up the cause of the harper; and turning to Wilhelm said: "Hadn't we better hear the man? It's so horribly slow now, we must really do something to amuse ourselves."

Melina was about to answer and a violent dispute would have arisen if the harper had not suddenly entered, welcomed and beckoned forward by Wilhelm.

The appearance of this old man amazed them all, and he had taken possession of a seat before any of the party could summon courage to ask a question or say a single word. His head was bald, encircled only by a few grey hairs, and large blue eyes looked out mildly from beneath his thick white eyebrows. His nose was beautifully formed, and from beneath it flowed a long white beard, leaving in sight a well-turned, pleasing lip. His long thin figure was wrapped in a dark brown mantle from head to foot; he placed his harp before him and began to prelude on its chords.

The agreeable tones he brought from the instrument soon restored the party to cheerfulness.

"You sing too, my good old man," said Philine.

"Give us something," said Wilhelm, "to delight our

hearts and heads as well as our senses. An instrument ought only to be an accompaniment for the voice; airs, passages and runs without words or meaning seem to me like butterflies or birds of gay plumage; they flutter in the air before our eyes and we may perchance wish to catch and keep them, but Song is like a genius; it rises towards Heaven and incites our better selves to travel thither with it."

The old man looked at Wilhelm, raised his eyes, struck a few chords on his harp and began. He sang in praise of Song, exalted the happiness of minstrels, and exhorted to honour them; and this with so much life and truth that it seemed as if the moment and the occasion had given birth to the song. Wilhelm could hardly help falling on his neck and embracing him; and the only thing that kept him on his seat was the fear of rousing a burst of laughter, as the others had already begun to make foolish remarks in a low tone, and were disputing whether the old man was a Jew or a priest.

They asked him who was the author of the song, but received an evasive answer. He said he had a great store of songs and only hoped they might please. Most of the party were merry and happy, even Melina's humour was pleasant and frank for him, and while they were talking and joking the old man began a most charming song full of thought and feeling, in praise of social life. He sang of unity and courtesy in sweet insinuating tones, but suddenly the song grew frigid, harsh, and confused: he was mourning over reserve in its odious manifestations, the shortsightedness of enmity and the peril of quarrels and divisions, and every soul among his listeners was glad to throw off these inconvenient fetters when, as if rising upward on the wings of a thrilling melody,

he praised the peace-makers and sang of the joy of souls who find each other again after such sad divisions.

He had scarcely finished when Wilhelm called out: "Whoever thou may'st be that, like a benevolent guardian genius, comest thus to us with thy blessing life-giving voice, accept my veneration and my thanks! Feel that we all admire thee, and if thou art in need of ought confide in us."

The old man was silent, he allowed his fingers to glide softly over the strings, then struck them more boldly and sang:

"What tones are sounding at our gate
And o'er the drawbridge stealing?
That song I'd have where sits our state:
Our ears would hear it pealing.
At these high words the foot-page flies:
He comes again: the monarch cries,
'Bring in the aged minstrel!'

"A greeting to you, noble knights!
Ye ladies fair, I greet ye!
Like stars ye sit, on summer nights,
And who could count or name ye?
In midst of all this glorious grace,
Close, eyes, your lids; this is no place
To take your fill of beauty.'

"The minstrel cast his eyes to earth:
His harp pealed out with power.
The knights gazed high, as seemed their birth,
The ladies low and lower.
The king approves the minstrel's strain,
Commands to bring a golden chain,
As guerdon for his singing.

"That golden chain give not to me;
Let it be borne in battle
By knights 'fore whom thy foemen flee.
Who splinter lance from saddle.
Or give it thy grave statesman there;
Let him its costly burden bear
Among his other burdens.'

“I'm but a minstrel like the bird
That in the branches singeth.
His song rewards him, e'en unheard,
And forth his course he wingeth;
But durst I, then one thing I'd ask:
A draught of wine from noblest flask,
In purest crystal goblet.’

“The wine was brought : he drank it up :
‘O draught of cheering flavour!
O house thrice-blest where such a cup
Is deemed a trifling favour!
When life goes well then think on me,
And thank your God, as I thank ye
For this pure cup of nectar.’”

When at the end of this song the old man took up the glass of wine which had been poured out for him and turning towards his benefactors drank it off at one draught with a friendly smile, there was great rejoicing, much clapping of hands, and many a loud wish that the draught might do him good and strengthen his aged limbs. He went on to sing some little romances, under the influence of which our party grew merrier than ever.

“Can you play ‘The shepherd deck'd him for the dance,’ old man?” said Philine.

“Oh yes,” he said, “if you will sing and act it, nothing shall be wanting on my part.”

Philine rose and stood ready for the music. The old harper began the air and she sang a song which we will rather not give our readers, as they might find it dull,—perhaps even wanting in delicacy.

Meanwhile the merriment increased, several bottles of wine had been emptied and the party were becoming very noisy. As the painful effects of the last merry-making were still fresh in our friend's remembrance, he tried to break up the party and gave the old man a liberal recompense for his trouble, to this the others each

added a trifle and they let him go to take some rest, promising themselves fresh pleasure from another trial of his skill in the evening.

When he was gone Wilhelm said to Philine: "I cannot say that I see much merit in that favourite song of yours, either poetically or morally considered; but if you would sing something really fit to be heard on the stage in the same unaffected, original, pretty style, I am sure you would be very much applauded."

"Yes," said Philine, "it must be a most delightful feeling to warm yourself at ice."

"This man," said Wilhelm, "really puts many an actor to shame. Did you notice what correct dramatic expression he gave to those romances? There was certainly more of acting in his singing than in our stiff figures on the stage. Many pieces are performed in such a fashion that, in comparison with this singing, they sound merely like a narrative repeated to us, while the musical narration is a scene made present to our senses."

"There you are unjust," answered Laertes. "I do not call myself either a great singer or a great actor, but this I do know, that when there is music to guide, enliven, and give a fixed measure to one's bodily movements—when the composer, as it were, dictates to me both declamation and expression—I am another man from what I am when in the dull prosaic drama I must find all this out for myself, and invent my own time and declamation; not to mention that any of the other actors may easily disturb all my arrangements."

"I only know," said Melina, "that in one point, and that too a most important one, this fellow shames us all. The strength of his talents shows itself in the profit he makes out of them. He moves us to share our meal

with him when we may very likely soon be in want of one ourselves; and the money that we could so well use in organising ourselves he lures out of our pockets with a little song. It seems so pleasant to squander away what which might procure subsistence for ourselves and others."

These remarks gave the conversation a turn which was not of the pleasantest. They were so evidently directed at Wilhelm, that he answered angrily, and then Melina, who was not in the habit of mincing matters, brought forward his grievance in very plain terms. "It is now a fortnight," he said, "since we went to look at the stage-properties and dresses lying in pawn here, and we could have had them all at a very fair price. At that time you led me to hope that you would lend me the necessary sum, but as yet I cannot see that you have ever thought of the matter again, or made any approach to a decision. If you had struck a bargain then we should have been well started by this time. You have not carried out your intention of leaving, nor have you, so far as I can see, been saving of your money during the time; at all events some people understand very well how to make opportunities for its going faster."

There was justice in this reproach, and it stung our friend. He answered hastily and angrily, and, as the party was rising in order to disperse, took his departure at once, leaving them clearly to understand that he would not stay much longer with such unfriendly and ungrateful people. He went downstairs in an ill-humour and seated himself on a stone bench at the gate of his own inn, unconscious that both the pleasure he had enjoyed and the annoyance that had followed had led him to take more wine than usual.

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER he had been sitting there a short time, gazing into vacancy and disturbed by various thoughts, Philine sauntered out of the inn-door singing, came up and seated herself close beside him, leant on his shoulder, played with his curls and accompanied her caresses with the fairest words in the world. She begged him to stay and not leave her alone with these people; she said she should die of *ennui*; indeed, she could not endure to live under the same roof with Melina any longer, and had therefore moved her quarters to Wilhelm's inn.

He tried hard to get rid of her, and to make her understand that he neither could nor ought to remain there any longer. All in vain, she went on entreating and beseeching and suddenly threw her arm round his neck and kissed him in the most eager, longing way.

"Philine!" he cried, "are you mad? what can you mean by making the public streets a witness of caresses which really I have done nothing to deserve? Leave me alone; I cannot stay here, and I will not.

"And I shall hold you tight," she said, "and kiss you here in the open street until you promise to do as I wish. I shall die of laughing," she went on; "for when they see all this familiarity the people will certainly take me for your wife of a month old, and this pretty sight will make the husbands praise me up to their wives as a very pattern of simple, childlike tenderness."

Just at that moment some people passed; she went on caressing him in the most charming fashion, and he, in order not to scandalise their feelings, was obliged to play the part of a patient husband. Then she made

faces at them after they were gone by, and in short behaved so naughtily in the wantonness of her spirits, that at last he was obliged to promise he would neither go away to-day, to-morrow nor even the day after.

"You're a regular stick!" she said at last, letting him go, "and I'm a fool to waste so much kindness on you." She got up pouting and moved a step or two away, but then turned back laughing and said: "I really believe that must be the reason why I make myself such a fool about you. I'm only going to fetch my knitting that I may have something to do. Stay there, and let me find the stone man on the stone seat when I come back again."

This once, however, she really did him an injustice, for much as he struggled to guard himself against her attractions, it is hardly probable that at that moment he would have left her caresses unreturned if they had been alone.

She threw a mischievous glance at him and went into the house. He had no business to follow her; on the contrary, her conduct had excited a fresh antipathy in his mind; and yet he rose from his seat to do so, scarcely knowing why.

He was just on the point of entering when Melina came up and in a humble tone began to beg his pardon for the too harsh expressions which he had used in their dispute. "I hope you are not offended," he said, "at what may sometimes appear to be over-anxiety on my part; but my circumstances warrant it. I have a wife—may soon have a child—to provide for, and cannot go on quietly from day to day living in the mere enjoyment of what presents itself, as you still have a right to do. Think over the matter again, and if possible put me in,

possession of those stage properties. I shall not remain in your debt long and shall be eternally grateful to you."

It was not at all agreeable to Wilhelm to be thus detained on the threshold when he was longing to overtake Philine, so he answered with a surprised, absent kind of good-temper which seemed to show that he only wanted to get rid of the matter: "If by doing this I can make you happy and contented, I won't think about the matter any longer. Go and put the thing in order; I will be ready with the money either this evening or to-morrow morning." In confirmation of this promise he gave Melina his hand, and was very glad to see him hurry away across the street; but alas, this hindrance to his entering the house was succeeded by another, and a still more unpleasant one.

A lad with a bundle on his shoulder came quickly down the street and stepped up to him. Wilhelm recognised him in a moment: it was Friedrich.

"Here I am again!" he shouted, his great blue eyes wandering over all the inn-windows joyfully as he spoke: "Where's Mamsell? The devil may manage to bear this world without seeing her; I can't!"

The landlord coming up at that moment answered: "She is upstairs," and in a moment, with two or three bounds, the boy was at the top of the stairs, leaving Wilhelm as if rooted to the threshold. In the first moment he longed to pull him down the stairs backwards by the hair of his head; then the very flow of his vital spirits and ideas seemed suddenly stopped by strong jealousy; and when he recovered from this sudden chill a sensation of restlessness and discomfort came over him, such as he had never experienced in his life before.

He went to his own room and found Mignon busy writing. For some time past the child had been taking pains to write down every thing she knew by heart, and had given all she wrote to her master and friend to correct. She was indefatigable and her powers of comprehension were good, but the lines remained crooked and the letters uneven; here too, her body seemed to run counter to her mind. When Wilhelm was in a quiet frame of mind the child's diligent application was a great pleasure to him, but to-day he took very little notice of what she had to show, and this grieved her all the more because she fancied she had done especially well this time.

His restless feelings drove him up and down the corridors and soon he found himself once more standing at the inn-door. A man on horseback galloped up; good-looking, and though apparently no longer young, brisk and cheerful for his years. The landlord hastened out to meet him and shook his hand as if he were an old acquaintance, with the words: "Ah, Herr Stallmeister!* so we've the pleasure of seeing you again!"

"I only want to bait my horse," replied the stranger. "I must go on to the estate at once and see that everything is put in order as soon as possible. The count and countess are coming to-morrow; they'll stop some time, as it's probable that the Prince of —— may make this neighbourhood his head-quarters, and they wish to give him the best entertainment possible."

"It's a pity you can't stay in our house," said the landlord. "We've got some pleasant company here just now." At this moment the groom galloped up and took

* Master of the stables: a term corresponding to our *equerry* or *master of the horse*, but not confined to the royal household.

his master's horse, leaving him and the landlord still talking at the door.

Wilhelm, noticing by their side-long glances that he formed the subject of conversation, turned away and walked up and down the street.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN his vexation and restlessness he thought he would go and hunt up the old minstrel: perhaps his harp might drive away the evil spirits. On asking for him, he was directed to a miserable public-house in a distant corner of the little town, and when he reached it told to climb to the topmost floor. As he was going up the sweet notes of the harp issued from a little garret, as if to meet him. The music was touching and plaintive, the song sad and distressed. Wilhelm crept softly to the door; and as the good old man was in a manner extemporising, and constantly repeated the same few stanzas sometimes reciting, sometimes singing them, the listener, after a little attention, could make out pretty much what follows:

“Who ne'er with tears hath ate his bread—
Who ne'er hath spent the long night hours
In bitter weeping on his bed,—
He knows ye not, ye Heavenly Powers.

“Ye lead a mortal into life,
Nor hold him back from sin or sorrow,
Then leave him to remorse and strife—
Sin's vengeance strikes, and waits no morrow.”

This melancholy wail coming from the heart of the singer went at once to the heart of the hearer. Sometimes Wilhelm fancied the old man's voice was checked by tears, for the chords would sound alone for a time,

and then the voice join in again, broken and softly. He leant against the door-post; his whole soul was stirred within him; the grief of this almost stranger unlocked his own burdened heart, and he made no effort to keep back the feeling of sympathy, or the tears that the old man's fervent lament drew from his eyes. All the mental pain that was weighing him down seemed to thaw in a moment; he gave way to his emotion, pushed the door open and stood before the old harper. He was seated on his wretched bed; it was the only piece of furniture in the poverty-stricken room.

"What feelings you have stirred up in me, good old man!" Wilhelm cried, as he came in. "You have set free all that was frozen up in my heart; pray, don't let my coming disturb you, but go on and make a friend happy while you soothe your own sorrow." The old man was going to rise and speak, but Wilhelm prevented him, for he had noticed at dinner that he spoke with difficulty. Instead, he took a seat by his side on the straw mattress.

The old harper dried his tears and asked with a friendly smile, "What made you come here? I had purposed waiting on you again this evening."

"We are quieter here," answered Wilhelm. "Now sing me what you like—what suits your own circumstances, just as if I were not in the room. It seems to me that you can't make a mistake to-day. You're a happy man to be able to entertain yourself so well in lonely hours; and wandering among strangers, as you do, always to find the best companion in your own heart."

The old man looked at his harp-strings played a soft prelude and began to sing:

"Who truly longs for solitude
Can quickly be alone :
The others live, the others love,
And leave him to his moan.

"Yes, leave me to my pain !
And could I only be
Once thoroughly alone,
My solitude would flee.

"A lover creeps softly and listens low :
Is his darling quite alone ?
So will steal on me day and night, I know,
My pain when I'm alone,
When I'm alone my woe.
Oh, were I once alone below,
Alone in the cold dark grave, I trow,
My torment must leave me and let me go."

We might go into great detail and yet not succeed in describing the grace and charm of that strange dialogue between our friend and the romantic old minstrel; for whatever the younger man said was answered by the elder in musical tones—tones which distinctly agreed with the matter of discourse, stirred up all the kindred emotions and opened a wide field for the imagination.

Any one who has been present at a meeting of pious people, come together in the belief that they can edify themselves more purely, fervently, and intellectually apart from the church, can form some idea of this scene. He will remember how the leader would adapt a verse from some hymn to his own remarks—a verse suited to raise the souls of his hearers and guide them in the upward direction he was wishing: how then some one else out of the congregation would quote a verse taken from another hymn and set to a different tune: a third would bring forward another: and how these many verses, though each would also suggest the kindred ideas in the hymns from which they were chosen, received such a new individual character from this new connexion that

they seemed as if composed in the moment of utterance, and thus, to those people at that moment, a familiar set of ideas was made to yield a new, original whole which animated, strengthened, and refreshed their souls. In this fashion the old man edified and instructed his guest; and by means of songs and quotations, some familiar others strange to him, brought all his feelings, whether lying close at hand or afar off, whether at the moment awake or slumbering, pleasant or painful, into such a circulation as in Wilhelm's present state of mind could not but be of benefit to him.

CHAPTER XIV.

AND indeed, on his way back Wilhelm meditated so much more seriously than he had ever done before on his present position, that by the time he reached his inn he had resolved to free himself from it. As he was coming in, the landlord told him in confidence that Philine had made a conquest of the count's equerry, who had returned in haste after executing his orders at the great house, and was now enjoying a good supper with her in her room.

At the same moment Melina came up with a lawyer; they went together to Wilhelm's room and he fulfilled his promise, though somewhat reluctantly, by giving Melina a bill for three hundred thalers; this the latter passed over to the lawyer, and received in return a document purporting that the sale of the stage properties was concluded and that they should be placed in his hands the next morning.

These two had scarcely left Wilhelm when he heard a fearful scream and a boyish voice threatening angrily

through sobs and howls.. He heard these lamentations descend from upstairs pass his room door and hasten down towards the entrance hall.

Curious to know what they could mean, he followed, and found Friedrich almost frantic with rage. The boy was crying, grinding his teeth, stamping on the floor, and doubling his fists; he seemed wild with anger and vexation. Mignon was standing opposite, silent and amazed, and the landlord gave him some explanation of this strange scene.

The boy, he said, had been very much pleased at Philine's reception of him; had danced, sung, and been in famous spirits until she made acquaintance with the *Stallmeister*. Then this half child, half youth, had begun to vent his ill-temper by slamming the doors and running up and down. Philine told him to wait at supper, on which he grew still more sulky and insolent, and finished by spilling a dish of ragout between her and her guest who sat close by her, instead of setting it on the table. On this the *Stallmeister* had given him a sound box on the ear and turned him out of the room. He himself—the landlord—had helped to cleanse their dresses, which were in a terrible plight.

On seeing that his revenge had taken effect the boy began to laugh heartily, though the tears were still running down his cheeks. He continued to rejoice for some time, but all at once the insult done him by his stronger adversary came back to his mind and he began to howl and threaten afresh.

Wilhelm grew thoughtful as he watched the boy. He felt ashamed, for Friedrich's conduct was but an exaggerated representation of his own state of mind: he too felt an unconquerable jealousy burning within him; he too had only been kept back by considerations of pro-

priety from giving way to his mad temper; he would have found a malicious pleasure in wounding the very person he loved and defying his rival: he longed to annihilate the beings who seemed only there to annoy and vex him.

Laertes came up and heard the story. It was a good joke to him to confirm the boy in his asseverations and oaths that the *Stallmeister* should and must give him satisfaction, that he had never put up with an affront yet, and that, if this was denied him, he would find some other way of revenging himself.

Laertes was in his element here; he went gravely upstairs to challenge the *Stallmeister* in Friedrich's name.

"That is a capital joke," said the *Stallmeister* when he heard the proposal. "I must confess I had hardly expected such first-rate fun to-night." They went down, followed by Philine. "My son," said the *Stallmeister* to Friedrich, "you're a brave lad, and I would on no account refuse to fight you, but considering that the difference in our age and strength would make the affair somewhat venturesome, I propose that we fight with foils the buttons of which shall be chalked and whoever makes the first or the greatest number of marks on his enemy's coat shall be considered victor and be treated with the best wine that can be got in the town."

Laertes decided that this proposal should be accepted and Friedrich obeyed him as his teacher. The foils were brought; Philine seated herself with her knitting and watched the combatants most composedly.

The *Stallmeister* was a very good fencer, but he was also obliging enough to spare his adversary and allow his own coat to be chalked two or three times; whereupon they embraced each other and the wine was ordered. The *Stallmeister* asked Friedrich who he was and what

had been his history, on which the boy told him a tale which he had often repeated before and with which at some future time we intend to make our readers acquainted.

Meanwhile this duel had been a finishing-touch to the picture of Wilhelm's own feelings, for he could not deny that it would have given him great pleasure to take up a foil, and still greater pleasure a sword, against the *Stallmeister*, though he clearly saw that the latter was far more than a match for him in the art of fencing. Still he would not vouchsafe Philine a single glance, refrained most carefully from saying a word that could have shown what he was feeling, and after drinking two or three times to the health of the combatants, went quickly back to his own room, where unpleasant thoughts crowded thickly on his mind.

He could remember a time when his spirit had been raised by hopeful efforts and strivings, bound down and checked by no conditions: when the keenest enjoyments of every kind were as an element in which he lived and moved. He could see clearly that now he had fallen into an irresolute, indefinite loitering and lounging, in which he only sipped what he had formerly drunk in full measure; but he could not see clearly what that invincible necessity was which nature had made a law to him, nor how much this necessity of his being had been stimulated, half-satisfied, and led astray by circumstances.

We must not therefore be surprised that, in thinking over his present circumstances and considering by what means he should free himself from them, he fell into great perplexity. It was not enough that his friendship for Laertes, his fancy for Philine, and the interest he felt in Mignon had detained him too long in a place and among people where he could cherish his favourite

fancies, gratify his wishes as it were by stealth, and creep clandestinely after his old dreams without setting himself any fixed aim. He believed he had strength of mind enough to tear himself away from all this and leave at once; but now, in addition, he had involved himself by the loan to Melina and also had made the acquaintance of the mysterious old harper the problem of whose life he was most eager to solve. Still, on further and careful consideration, he determined or thought he had, that even these last motives should not keep him there any longer. "I must go, I will go!" he said aloud, and threw himself on to a chair in great agitation.

Mignon came in and asked if she could do anything for him before he went to bed. She came in very gravely and quietly; his short answer in the afternoon had wounded her deeply.

Nothing is more touching than to see a love which has been nursed in secret—a trust which has grown strong unseen and unheard and of which its object has hitherto been unworthy—coming forward at the right moment and revealing itself. The bud which had remained so long, so sternly closed, was ripe to open now, and Wilhelm's heart could not have been taken at a more impressive moment.

She stood before him and saw his agitation. "Master," she said, "if you are unhappy, what will become of Mignon?"

"Dear little creature," he said, taking her hands in his, "you are one cause of my sorrow—I must go away." She looked into his eyes, saw the tears glistening there, and fell on her knees before him. He still held her hands, she laid her head on his knees and remained perfectly still. He played with her hair and stroked her.

gently. She remained motionless a long time. At last he noticed a kind of convulsive twitching in her frame; it began gently, increasing by degrees and spreading through every limb. "What is the matter, Mignon?" he said; "what ails you?" She raised her little head and looked at him, then suddenly laid her hand on her heart as if striving to hide some sharp pain. He raised her but she fell on to his lap. He took her in his arms and kissed her, but she neither moved nor pressed his hand in answer. Her own hand she held firmly on her heart. Suddenly she uttered a shriek, her body became convulsed, she started up, and fell on the ground as if every joint were dislocated. It was a frightful sight. "My child," said Wilhelm, lifting her up, and holding her firmly in his arms, "my child, what ails you?" The spasms continued, they spread from the heart to the poor dislocated limbs; she only hung in his arms. He pressed her to his heart and his tears fell on her face. All at once she seemed to be straining every power again as if enduring the greatest bodily suffering; fresh, vehement life came into her limbs, her arms closed round his neck like a spring, it seemed as if a rock had been rent within her, and a flood of tears burst from her closed eyes. He held her fast. She wept, and no tongue can describe the power of these tears. Her long hair had fallen down and hung loosely about her; her entire being seemed melting away in a ceaseless stream of tears. Her rigid limbs relaxed, her whole soul was flowing forth; and in the perplexity of the moment Wilhelm really feared that she was dissolving in his arms—that nothing would be left behind for him to keep. He held her faster still. "My child!" he cried, "my child! you know you are mine, if that word can comfort you; you are mine; you shall stay with me,

I will not leave you." But still her tears flowed on. At last she sat up. A gleam of tender cheerfulness was on her face. "My father!" she said, "you will not forsake me, you will be my father! I am your child."

At that moment the harp sounded softly outside the door. It was the old man bringing his best songs as an evening offering to his friend, and Wilhelm, clasping his child closer and closer in his arms, felt a pure unmixed happiness beyond the power of words to describe.

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

"Know'st thou the land where the pale lemon blows?
 And 'midst dark, glist'ning leaves the golden orange grows?
 A gentle breeze blows soft from deep blue skies,
 'Neath which the myrtles sweet and stately laurels rise?
 Know'st thou this land?"

There, there, with thee,
 Whom I love best, oh, let me quickly flee!

Know'st thou the house? its roof tall columns bear,
 Its halls are splendid, chambers rich and rare;
 And marble statues stand and gaze on me:
 'What have they done, thou poor dear child, to thee?'
 Know'st thou that house?"

O thither, but with thee,
 Let me, O my protector, wander free!

Know'st thou the mountain with its path through clouds?
 And caves where fierce old dragons rear their broods?
 That mist where e'en the mule must seek his way?
 Where torrents dash o'er rending rocks their spray?
 Know'st thou this too?"

O there! O there with thee—
 There lies our way! my Father, let us flee!"

THE next morning Wilhelm looked about the house for Mignon; she was nowhere to be found, but he heard that she had gone out with Melina who had started betimes to take possession of his stage properties and wardrobe.

A few hours passed away and Wilhelm heard a sound of music at his door. At first he thought it must be the old harper, but he soon distinguished the tones of a Cithern and the voice which began to sing was

Mignon's. He opened the door, the child came in and sang the song we have just given.

Both the melody and expression pleased our friend extremely, but he could not understand every word. He made her repeat the verses and explain them; he then wrote them down and translated them into German. But in his version he could not at all approach the originality of her sentences and turns of expression; and the childlike simplicity that agreed so well with her broken language and connected all that was incoherent, vanished under his hands. The charm of the melody too he could compare with nothing he had ever heard.

She began each verse in a stately, solemn way, as if she wished to draw attention to something remarkable, and had something weighty to impart to her hearers; at the third line her singing became gloomy and mournful; the question, "Know'st thou this land?" was given cautiously and mysteriously; in the "There, there, with thee," lay a tone of irrepressible longing, and the last words of each verse she managed so to modify at each repetition that they were sometimes full of entreaty and supplication, while at others they had an eager, urging tone and were full of promise.

When she had ended her song the second time she gazed keenly at Wilhelm for a moment in silence, and then said: "*Know'st* thou the land?" "It must be Italy," answered Wilhelm, "where did you learn that little song?" "Italy!" said Mignon significantly; "if you go to Italy take me with you: I am so cold here." "Have you ever been there, little one?" said Wilhelm. The child was silent and nothing more was to be got out of her.

Melina coming in just then was very much pleased to see that the Cithern was already put into such good

order. The instrument had been lying among the old stage costumes; Mignon had begged for it that morning, the harper had strung it for her and the child had all at once revealed a talent of which no one till then had had any idea.

Melina had already taken possession of the wardrobe and all else thereto appertaining; some members of the town council had promised him permission to give performances for a time in the place, and he arrived at his inn with a happy heart and a cheerful countenance. He seemed altogether another man; not only gentle and polite towards every one, but even engaging and full of ready courtesy. He congratulated himself on being able now to give employment to his friends who had been so long idle and at a loss for occupation; he could indeed offer them a temporary engagement, though he regretted that as yet he was not in a position to reward as they deserved; the very superior talents and capacities which fortune had thrown in his way the debt to a friend so generous as Wilhelm had proved himself to be taking precedence of every other claim.

"I have no words," he said to Wilhelm, "in which to express my sense of the friendship you have shown in thus helping me to the management of a theatre. When we first met I was very strangely circumstanced. You will remember how strongly I then expressed my dislike to the stage; and yet, no sooner was I married, than out of love to my wife who promised herself much pleasure and great applause as an actress, I was forced to look out for an engagement. I could find none, at least no constant one, but fortunately had offers from men of business, who needed some one that could write well, understood French and had had some little experience in arithmetic, to make himself useful on special occasions. For a time

I went on very well, was fairly paid, able to buy many needful things and had no reason to be ashamed of my position. But the special occasions on which I could be useful to my patrons came to an end, there was no hope of a permanent situation, and my wife's desires for the stage returned more vehemently than ever. Now however, I hope that the establishment which through your help I shall be able to set on foot may prove a good beginning for me and mine, and if my fortune prospers I shall owe it all to you."

Wilhelm was pleased to hear him speak in this manner; the actors too were all very fairly satisfied with the announcements of the new manager, rejoiced in secret that an engagement had appeared so soon, and were inclined to put up with small pay at first, because, coming so unexpectedly the greater part of them looked on it as something extra on which a few days before they had had no right to count. Melina was prepared to take advantage of this favourable state of mind; he dexterously managed to speak to each apart from the rest, and so to persuade them, some in one way, some in another, that they were all ready to sign the contract in a hurry, scarcely reflecting on the new relation into which they were about to enter, and fancying themselves sure of being able to get free again on giving six weeks' warning.

But now the conditions had to be brought into due form, and Melina was already pondering over the pieces most likely to allure the public, when a courier rode up, announced to the *Stallmeister* that his lordship and the countess were close at hand, and the *Stallmeister* ordered the fresh relay of horses to be brought out.

The heavily laden carriage soon rolled up to the inn door, two men-servants jumped down from the box,

and Philine, who of course was sure to be first in the way, stationed herself in the doorway.

"Who are you?" said the Countess as she went in.

"An actress, at your Excellency's service," was the answer; and the sly little puss bent down to kiss the lady's dress with the meekest of faces and gestures.

The Count, seeing other persons standing round who also gave themselves out for actors, made many enquiries as to the strength of the company, where they had last played, and who was their manager. "Now if they were French," he said to his wife, "we could surprise the prince most agreeably by providing him with his favourite amusement at our own house."

"Perhaps," said the Countess, "though unfortunately they are Germans, it might still be possible to let them play at the castle so long as the prince is with us. Surely they must be able to do something. For amusing a large party there is nothing so good as a theatre, and the baron will give them a little training."

As she said this they went upstairs, where Melina presented himself as manager. "Call your people together," said the Count, "and present them to me. I should like to see what they are worth, and I should wish too to see a list of the pieces they can perform."

Melina made a deep bow, hastened out of the room, and soon returned with his actors. They crowded in one upon another; some were awkward from an overweening desire to please and others made no better figure because they were too careless. Philine devoted her most respectful attention to the Countess who was extremely kind and gracious; the Count, meanwhile, examined the rest. He asked each separately what characters he had been accustomed to act and turning to Melina remarked that it was most important to keep

each strictly to his own province, an observation which Melina received with the greatest devotion.

The Count then told each actor what he especially ought to study and what might be improved in his figure and attitudes, showed them clearly in what points German actors were always deficient and, in short, manifested such extraordinary knowledge that they all stood deeply humbled before such an enlightened judge and illustrious patron, and scarcely ventured to draw their breath.

"Who is that man in the corner?" said the Count, looking at some one who had not yet been presented to him. A gaunt and abject figure approached, clothed in a threadbare coat patched at the elbows and with a miserable periwig on his head.

This man, whom we know already to be Philine's favourite, was accustomed to play pedantic old men, schoolmasters and poets, and generally undertook those characters on which blows and mortifications were to fall. He had adopted certain ridiculously cringing timid bows and his stammering way of speaking suited the parts he took so well that he always brought a laugh from the audience; he was therefore considered a useful member of the company, especially as he was also very obliging and good-natured. He came up to the Count in his own peculiar fashion, made his bow, and answered every question just as he would have answered on the stage. The Count looked at him some time with pleased attention; then turning to the Countess: "My child," he said, "do me the favour to watch this man attentively. I would guarantee that he either is or can become a great actor." The fellow in the joy of his heart made such an absurd bow that the count burst out laughing: "First-rate! that fellow knows what he's about. I'll wager

that he can act whatever he chooses, and it's a pity that he hasn't been put to some better use already."

Such a marked preference was very mortifying for all the rest; except indeed for Melina; he was not in the least disconcerted by it, acknowledged that the count was perfectly right and answered in the most respectful manner: "Yes, indeed; for him, as well as for many of us, such a judge of these things and such kind encouragement as we have now found in your Excellency is probably all that has been wanting."

"Have I seen the whole company?" said the Count.

"A few members are absent," answered the shrewd Melina; "indeed, if we could only meet with support we should soon be able to make up our numbers out of the neighbourhood."

Meanwhile Philine whispered to the Countess: "There is a very good-looking young man upstairs, who I'm sure could soon learn to play the principal lovers."

"Why doesn't he appear?" said the countess.

"I will fetch him," answered Philine, and she ran out of the room.

She found Wilhelm still busy with Mignon and persuaded him to come down with her. His curiosity conquered his reluctance to follow her, for having heard of these aristocratic personages he was seized with a desire to make their nearer acquaintance. He came into the room; the Countess was looking at him, and their eyes met. Philine led him up to her while the count was busied with the others. Wilhelm made a low bow; he was slightly embarrassed as he answered the different questions put by this charming woman. Her beauty, youth, grace, delicacy and charm of manner made a most agreeable impression on him, and this was increased by a certain bashfulness which accompanied her

words and actions; one might almost have said she was embarrassed too. He was also presented to the Count who took small notice of him, but went up to his wife who was standing in the window, and seemed to be asking her some questions. It was easy to see that her opinion entirely agreed with his, indeed she seemed desirous of strengthening him in it by earnest entreaties.

He soon turned round again to the company, and said: "I cannot stop now myself, but I will send a friend of mine to you; and if your terms prove reasonable and you are disposed to take great pains I do not feel disinclined to have you to play at my castle."

Every body testified great joy at this announcement; Philine especially, kissed the Countess's hand with the greatest fervency.

"You see, little one," said the Countess, patting the giddy girl's cheek, "you see you will be coming to me again, and I will keep my promise only you must dress yourself better." Philine excused herself on the ground that she had but little to spend on her wardrobe, on which the Countess told her waiting-women to bring up an English hat and a silk neckerchief that could be unpacked without much trouble. These she put on Philine with her own hands; the girl meanwhile continuing with pretty ways and gestures to play the hypocritical little innocent.

The Count gave his hand to his lady and led her downstairs. She bowed to them all kindly as she left the room, turning round once more to Wilhelm and saying in the most gracious manner: "We shall soon meet again."

These happy prospects put fresh life into the whole party. Every one gave full play to his hopes, wishes, and fancies, discussed the characters he would act and

the applause he should receive. Melina considered how he could best and most speedily arrange a few performances so as to gain some money from the little town and set his company fairly on their legs, while others went into the kitchen to order a somewhat better dinner than they had lately been accustomed to.

CHAPTER II.

A FEW days after this the Baron came. He was received by Melina with some trepidation, for the Count had spoken of him as a *connoisseur* in theatrical matters; it was therefore to be feared that he would soon discover the weak side of the little community and perceive that not having characters enough to act one single play perfectly they could not be a regular troupe of actors. But the manager, as well as all the members of his company were soon relieved from their anxieties. The Baron proved to be an enthusiastic admirer of the German stage; every actor and every company was a welcome sight and a source of gratification to him. He saluted them all with great ceremony, congratulated himself on thus unexpectedly meeting with a company of German actors with whom he could so quickly enter into a connexion, and thus be enabled to introduce the Muses of his native country into the mansion of one of his own relatives. Soon after saying this he drew from his pocket a bundle of papers which Melina hoped might prove to contain the outlines of their agreement. He was mistaken. The Baron begged them to listen with attention to a play which he had written himself and wished to see performed by them; and the circle of hearers closed up willingly; for, though the bulk of the manuscript roused

apprehensions that its reading would demand an immoderate loss of time, they were happy to have an opportunity of securing the favour of a man so necessary to them at such small cost. Their fears were justified: the piece was written in five acts, and acts of a sort that might be called interminable.

The hero was well-born: a virtuous, generous man, misunderstood and persecuted: gaining the victory however at last over all his enemies, on whom the strictest poetical justice would have been summarily executed if he had not pardoned them on the spot. While this piece was being read the hearers had leisure to think of themselves and to rise gently from the lowly frame of mind into which but now they had been inclined to sink, to heights of self-complacency from which most delightful prospects opened out upon their sight. Those among them who could find no character adapted to their own gifts condemned the piece in their hearts and looked on the Baron as an unsuccessful author: those, on the contrary, who thought they discovered in any particular passage a prospect of applause for themselves were loud in their praises, to his great satisfaction.

The financial part of the affair was very speedily settled. Melina managed to make an advantageous contract with the Baron and at the same time keep the terms secret from the others.

Of Wilhelm Melina made a passing mention to the Baron, assuring him that he had good qualifications for a dramatic poet and was not at all ill suited for an actor. The baron at once claimed his acquaintance as a colleague, and Wilhelm produced some short pieces which, with a few relics, had chanced to escape the fire on that memorable evening when everything else had been given over to the flames. The baron praised both,

the pieces and his style of reading them, spoke of his coming to the castle with the rest as a settled thing, and on taking leave promised them all the best reception good food and comfortable quarters, applause and presents; to which Melina added the assurance of a fixed sum for pocket-money.

Of course the Baron's visit put every one into high spirits; it was so delightful to have a prospect of honour and comfort before them in place of anxiety and depression of all kinds. They made merry in anticipation of the coming good, and there was not one of them who would not have felt it mean at such a time to keep a single penny unspent in his pocket.

Wilhelm meanwhile was consulting with himself whether he should go to the castle or not, and decided that in more senses than one it would be advisable to do so. Melina had hoped that this profitable engagement would enable him to pay off part, at least, of his debt: then, one of our friend's great objects in life being to study mankind, where could he find a better opportunity of making acquaintance with that great world in which he hoped to find the solution of many a puzzling question about life art, and himself? He did not in these meditations confess, even to his own heart, how much he longed to see the beautiful Countess again, but rather tried to bring forward general arguments proving the advantage it would be to him to make a closer acquaintance with the rich and aristocratic world. He thought of the Count, the Countess, and the Baron; and when he remembered the quiet assurance ease and grace of their whole behaviour, exclaimed aloud, no one being near to hear his rapture: "Thrice happy are those whose birth sets them at once above the lower grades of humanity! They have no need to pass through, nay, nor even to

tarry a while as guests and gaze upon conditions of existence in which many good and worthy souls must fret and grieve their entire lives away. How broad must be their judgment from that high point of view, how clear their sight, how easy every step in their lives! It is as if in that passage which we all have to make, they had been placed at their very birth in a ship which enabled them to take advantage of favourable winds and lie by until the adverse gales had spent themselves; while others have to swim, each wearying himself single-handed in his struggle with the waves; and being able to seize small profit from the favourable winds, sinks with wornout powers in the storm. What ease too and what facilities, an inherited fortune brings with it! how certainly any business must flourish which is backed by a capital that will prevent its projector's hands from being tied by every unsuccessful speculation! Who can form a better estimate of earthly things than the man who has enjoyed them from his youth up? who can guide his own mind earlier to what is necessary, useful, and true, than the man who is so placed as to discover his errors while he is young enough and his powers are fresh enough to begin a new life?

Thus did our friend congratulate not only all whose fate had placed them in those upper regions, but also those who had the good fortune to approach such a circle and drink water from such springs, and praised his own good genius which seemed preparing to conduct him thither too.

Melina, meanwhile, had been racking his brain in the endeavour to divide his company properly according to the Count's wish and his own conviction and to assign each actor his due place; and at last, now that a performance really stood before the door, he had to be

thankful if, seeing that their numbers were so small, every actor were willing to do his best whatever the part that fell to his lot. Laertes however generally played the lovers, Philine the waiting-maids, the two girls shared the artless and the sentimental love-sick maidens, while the boisterous old gentlemen were better played than any of the other characters. Melina considered himself capable of giving the cavaliers; Madame Melina, to her great disgust, was transferred to the division of young wives or even tender mothers; and as in the more modern plays poets and pedants were seldom made ridiculous, the Count's favourite was obliged to play presidents and ministers of state who were generally represented as villains and fearfully maltreated in the fifth act. In the same way Melina, as groom of the chambers or lord chamberlain, pocketed gladly the various uncivil speeches which in several favourite plays of that day were made to him in the traditional style by plain-speaking, honest Germans; because the part gave him an opportunity of dressing himself splendidly and assuming the air of a courtier, in which he believed himself perfect.

Their performances had not gone on long before actors poured in from different parts of the country, and were engaged without any especial trial, but also without any especial terms of payment.

Wilhelm interested himself very warmly in the matter, though he resisted all Melina's efforts to secure him in the character of a lover on the stage; but his endeavours met with not the slightest acknowledgment from the new manager, who seemed to believe that all the necessary knowledge and insight had descended upon him with the dignity. Striking out passages in the plays was his favourite occupation; and in cutting them down he was regardless of every consideration but the length of time

they ought to occupy. He met with great encouragement, the public was satisfied, and the people of most taste in the little town affirmed that the theatre in the residence was not so well-appointed as their own.

CHAPTER III.

AT last the time came when they were to make preparations for the journey and might expect the coaches and carriages that were to convey the whole troop to the Count's mansion. Many and great were the disputes beforehand as to their seats and who should ride together; when at length with great pains all had been settled, their trouble proved to have been in vain, as fewer vehicles arrived than had been expected and they had to arrange themselves afresh according to the altered circumstances. The Baron soon followed on horseback, and gave as a reason that everything was in great commotion at the castle, for that not only the prince was to arrive some days sooner than had been expected, but other unlooked-for visitors had turned up and the house was already so full that he feared the quarters assigned them would not be so good as had been originally intended, for which he was extremely sorry.

They distributed themselves, as well as was possible, in the carriages, and as the weather was tolerably fair and the castle not more than a few hours' walk from the town, the most jovial among the party determined rather to walk than wait for the return of the carriages.

The caravan departed with shouts of joy, for the first time freed from all anxiety as to the reckoning. The Count's castle stood before their minds like a fairy palace; they were the happiest, merriest folks in the world; and

during the drive each in his own fashion connected a bright future of good fortune, fame, and prosperity with the events of that day.

A heavy rain began to fall unexpectedly, but even this could not disturb their happiness, though as it grew steadily heavier, some of the party began to feel serious inconvenience from the wet. Night came on and with it the most welcome sight possible; the Count's palace shining down upon them from the hill above, every story so brilliantly lighted that they could count the windows. On coming nearer they saw that the windows of both the wings were lighted up too; and each of them began to speculate on the position of his future room, the greater number modestly contenting themselves with a garret or a chamber in one of the side-buildings.

As they passed the village inn Wilhelm stopped the carriage, intending to take up his quarters there; but the landlord assured him it was impossible: he had not a single corner free, for unexpected guests having arrived at the castle, his lordship had engaged the whole inn, and the names of those who were to inhabit each room had been distinctly chalked on the doors since yesterday. Our friend was therefore obliged, much against his will, to drive into the castle courtyard with the rest of the party.

Round the kitchen fire in one of the wings they saw cooks moving busily to and fro and felt revived by the sight. Men-servants with lights sprang down the staircase of the main building, and the hearts of our good wayfarers swelled with joy at these cheerful prospects. Imagine their dismay when this brilliant reception suddenly turned into a volley of oaths and the servants began abusing the drivers for having turned into that courtyard, shouting to them to turn round again and go

proaching and they could recognise the voices of those of their own party who had been left to follow on foot. They told them that the Baron had fallen from his horse and seriously injured his foot, and that they too on enquiring at the castle had been roughly dismissed and sent hither.

The whole party was in the greatest perplexity; they deliberated but came to no result. At last, a lantern appearing in the distance, they drew breath once more; but as the vision came nearer the hope of a speedy deliverance departed. It was the *Stallmeister*, lighted by a groom. He asked eagerly for Mademoiselle Philine, and as soon as she appeared from among the little crowd, entreated to be allowed to take her to the other house where a corner had been prepared for her with the Countess's waiting-women. She was not long in thankfully accepting this offer, and commending her trunk to the care of the rest took his arm and was hurrying off, when the others intercepted their retreat and so begged and conjured the *Stallmeister* that, in order to get free with his fair lady, he promised the castle should be soon opened and they comfortably lodged within it. They watched the glimmer of his lantern fading in the distance and long indeed did they wait in vain for the fresh light which at last, after they had been indulging in every variety of complaint and invective, appeared and imparted some hope and consolation.

An old under-servant came and opened the door of the building. The crowd pushed their way into it. Each began to look after the unloading and securing of his own luggage, most part of which like its owners was by this time thoroughly soaked with the rain. By the light of a single candle this work proceeded very slowly; they jostled one against another, stumbled over the things and fell. They begged for more candles and for fuel.

The monosyllabic old man however would hardly be persuaded to leave them even this one lantern; he then departed to return no more.

They began to search the house; the doors of all the rooms stood open; large stoves, tapestry hangings, and inlaid floors still remained, the tokens of former splendour; but not a vestige of other household furniture was to be seen—not a single chair, table, or looking-glass: only a few huge, empty bedsteads despoiled both of necessary and ornamental furniture. They were reduced to their wet trunks and portmanteaus for seats, and some of the poor tired wayfarers took up with the floor. Wilhelm had chosen some steps and Mignon lay on his knees. The child was restless; he asked what ailed her, and she answered, "I am so hungry." He had nothing to give her, the others had consumed every morsel of provision and the poor little creature was forced to remain without food. During this entire scene Wilhelm had remained inactive, absorbed in his own thoughts. He was annoyed and angry with himself for not having held firm to his first intention and lodged at the inn, even if he had been obliged to sleep in the loft.

The rest behaved each in his own fashion. Some piled up a quantity of old wood in the capacious drawing-room fire-place and kindled the pile with shouts of joy; alas, their hopes of being warmed and dried were doomed to woful disappointment. The fire-place was only built for ornament and so bricked up within that the smoke poured quickly back and filled the whole suite of rooms. The dry wood crackled and blazed up, but the flames were driven back and carried hither and thither so uncertainly by the draught that blew in at the broken window-panes, that there was reason to fear the castle might take fire. They were obliged to

pull their fire to pieces, stamp it out, and pour water on it, all which so increased the smoke that at last it became nearly unendurable and they felt almost desperate.

Wilhelm had gone into a distant room to escape the smoke; he was soon followed by Mignon, leading in a well-dressed footman, who carried a large, brightly burning double lantern. He came up to Wilhelm with an exquisite china plate full of fruit and sweetmeats, and said: "That young girl in the other house has sent you this; she begs you will come over and join their party. I was to tell you," the man added with a mischievous smile, "that she is very well off there, and wishes to share her pleasure with her friends."

This offer surprised Wilhelm extremely, as since the adventure on the stone bench he had treated Philine with decided contempt; and indeed so determined was he never to have anything more to do with her that he was on the point of sending the sweet gifts back again when a beseeching look from Mignon changed his mind and he took them, returning his thanks in the child's name, but refusing her invitation altogether. He begged the servant to make some provision for the comfort of the other newly-arrived guests and enquired after the Baron. He was in bed said the man, but so far as he knew had already commissioned some one else to see that their miserable quarters were improved.

The servant then departed, leaving Wilhelm one of his two candles; in default of a candlestick he stuck it on the window-sill, and now at least had the four walls of the room to look at as he meditated. It was not long either before preparations really began for the rest and comfort of our pilgrims. Slowly, one after another, candles appeared though without snuffers; then a few

chairs, an hour later some warm coverlets and then pillows; but all were wet through, and it was long past midnight before the palliasses and mattresses arrived, which would have been so welcome at first.

Refreshments had also been sent during this interval, and these were disposed of without much criticism, though, looking as they did very like the confused remains from other tables, they did not speak well for the esteem in which our guests were held.

CHAPTER IV.

THE bad behaviour and rollicking spirits of some of the party added greatly to the discomfort and restlessness of that first night. They teased and woke each other out of sleep, playing all kinds of practical jokes. Morning dawned amidst loud complaints of their friend the Baron, who had given such a different picture of the order and comfort they might expect to find. But to their surprise and consolation the Count himself came early to enquire after their welfare.

On hearing the miserable report they had to give he was indignant; on which the Baron, who was led up limping, accused the house-steward of having acted in defiance of all his orders on this occasion, evidently hoping by this accusation to bring him into great disgrace.

The Count then ordered that at once and in his presence, his guests should be made as comfortable as possible. A few officers came in to make acquaintance with the actresses and the Count had every member of the company presented to him, spoke to each by name and introduced a few jokes into his conversation, so that they were all enchanted with his lordship's affability.

At last Wilhelm was obliged to take his turn and came forward with Mignon clinging to him. He excused himself as well as he could for the liberty he had taken, but the Count seemed to look on his presence there as an expected thing.

A gentleman who was standing by the Count, and who, though he wore no uniform, looked like an officer, took more notice of Wilhelm than of the rest and spoke a good deal with him. His large, light blue eyes shone out from beneath a high forehead, his fair hair was thrown carelessly back from his face, and his stature, though not tall, showed vigour, firmness, and decision of character. He was eager in asking questions, and seemed at home in the subjects he asked about.

Wilhelm enquired whether the Baron knew anything of him, and heard but little in his favour: he had the title of Major, was in reality the Prince's favourite, transacted all his most private affairs and was said to be his right hand: indeed there was reason to believe that he was the Prince's natural son. He had been attached to embassies in France, England and Italy, and had been distinguished everywhere; this had made him conceited; he fancied he knew German literature thoroughly and indulged in all kinds of empty raillery about it. He, the Baron, avoided all conversation with him and would advise Wilhelm to do the same, for in the end he was sure to find some fault with every one. He was called Jarno, but nobody knew what to make of the name.

To all this Wilhelm could give no answer, for though there was something cold and repellant in the stranger's manner he felt drawn towards him.

The company of actors was now distributed¹ in the rooms of the old castle, and Melina gave strict orders

as to their behaviour. The women were to have separate apartments, each member was to direct his attention to his art and to make the study of the parts he had to play his entire end and aim. Rules and ordinances consisting of many articles were fixed to the doors, and fines for transgression of these were to be deposited by offenders in a common box.

Little attention, however, was paid to these rules. The young officers came and went at their pleasure, jesting in a rather coarse fashion with the actresses, making game of the actors and destroying the little police regulations before they had had time to take root. They chased one another through the rooms, dressed themselves up, played at hide and seek. Melina, who really wished to take matters earnestly, was completely exasperated at their mischievous insolence, and when he was suddenly sent for by the Count to look at the rooms in which the theatre was to be set up, things grew worse and worse. The young officers devised all kinds of unrefined practical jokes, some of the actors helping to give them a still coarser tinge, till it seemed as if the old castle was possessed by a troop of raging demoniacs and the riot lasted till all were called to table.

The count took Melina into a large hall, forming part of the old castle, and yet connected by a gallery with the new building in which it seemed that a small theatre could be erected; and here the sensible master of the house explained how he would wish everything to be arranged.

The work was begun in haste, the frame-work for stage and theatre set up and decorated, every morsel of scenery and decoration that the actors had brought with them turned to some use and what was still wanting fabricated for the occasion with the help of some clever fellows among the Count's own people. Wilhelm put his

hand to the work with a will, helped in defining the perspective and measuring the outlines, and gave himself great pains that everything might be done in good style. The Count who often came in to watch their progress was very much pleased; he showed them the right way in which every thing they undertook ought really to be carried out, and developed an extraordinary amount of knowledge in every branch of art.

At last the rehearsals began and for these there would have been abundance of space and leisure if they had not been perpetually disturbed by the presence of strangers; but there were daily fresh arrivals at the castle, and none of the visitors would be content without a due inspection of the actors.

CHAPTER V.

FOR some days the Baron had been holding out a hope to Wilhelm that some day he should be formally presented to the Countess. "I have told this charming woman," he said, "so much about the feeling and talent shown in those pieces of yours that she is impatient to speak with you and hear you read some of them aloud. Be ready to come over at the first hint, for you will certainly be sent for directly the Countess has a quiet morning." He then pointed out which, in his opinion, would be the best after-piece to read first, one which he said would make a great impression in his favour, and added that the Countess had expressed great regret at his visit occurring in the midst of so much disturbance, and his being obliged to put up with the poor accommodations which were supplied in the old castle to the actors.

On hearing this Wilhelm applied himself most diligently to the study of the piece with which he was to make his entry into the great world. As he did so he said to himself: "Hitherto you have been working quietly for your own pleasure, applauded only by one or two friends; for some time you doubted whether you had any talent, and even now you cannot be sure that you are on the right road and that your love of the drama is not greater than your talent for dramatic writing. The experiment of reading aloud to such experienced judges, and in a room where there can be no illusion, is far more dangerous than elsewhere, yet I should not like to hang back, and I should enjoy connecting this pleasure with former happy days and opening a wider prospect for myself in the future."

He then took one or two of his pieces, read them carefully over, made corrections here and there, recited them aloud so as to be perfectly versed in the language and expression, and one morning, when the Countess had sent for him, put that one into his pocket which he had practised most and by which he hoped to earn the most honour.

The Baron had assured him she would be alone with one of her intimate friends. As he entered, the Baroness von C. came in a very friendly manner to meet him, rejoiced at making his acquaintance and presented him to the Countess, who was under the hands of her hairdresser and received him with much kindness. But he was sorry to see Philine kneeling by her chair and playing all sorts of nonsensical pranks. "This pretty child has been singing to us," said the Baroness. "Finish your little song; we don't want to lose any of it."

Wilhelm listened to her song patiently; he was in hopes that the hairdresser would go away before he began to read. Meanwhile a cup of chocolate was offered

him and the Baroness herself handed him the biscuits. But he could not enjoy it; he was too eager to read the Countess something that should please and interest her. Philine's presence too, disturbed him; he had already had awkward experience of her as a listener. He watched every movement of the hairdresser almost with pain, so fervently did he long for the erection on which he was at work to be completed. During this time the Count had come in to tell her what guests were expected, what plans had been made for the day, and other domestic matters. Then some officers begged permission to wait on her, as they were obliged to leave before dinner, and the hairdresser having finished they were allowed to enter.

Meanwhile the Baroness took pains to entertain our friend and show him due respect; he received her kindness with becoming reverence but his manner was somewhat absent. Now and then he felt for the manuscript in his pocket and hoped that his moment was coming, but at last his patience nearly broke down, for a man with fancy wares was brought into the room, who began opening his boxes and trays one after another without mercy and showing every description of article he carried with a persistence and obtrusiveness peculiar to his race.

The party round the Countess grew larger. The Baroness looked at Wilhelm and said something in a low tone to the Countess; he noticed it but did not guess the meaning until, on reaching his room after an hour of anxious fruitless waiting, he found a beautiful English note-case in his pocket. The Baroness had managed to put it in secretly, and soon after he had made this discovery the Countess's little black page arrived with a prettily embroidered waistcoat, but with no distinct message as to the sender.

CHAPTER VI.

A MIXTURE of annoyed and yet grateful feeling followed, which spoilt the rest of Wilhelm's day; but towards evening he found fresh occupation for his mind. Melina came to inform him that the Count had spoken of an opening piece to be given in the Prince's honour on the day of his arrival, and in which the characteristic qualities of this great hero and philanthropist were to be personified. These virtues were to appear together and declare his praise, then wreath his bust with garlands of flowers and crowns of laurel, during which a brilliant transparency was to be exhibited, containing the letters of his name interlaced in each other, and the princely coronet. The composition and arrangement of this piece the Count had entrusted to him, Melina said, and he hoped that Wilhelm, to whom matters of this kind were a mere trifle, would help him.

"What!" exclaimed Wilhelm in indignation, "have we no better way of honouring such a Prince than by portraits, allegorical figures and interlaced initials? To my thinking he deserves a quite different kind of eulogy. How can a sensible man possibly feel flattered by seeing himself in effigy and the letters of his name shining on oiled paper. Then too I should very much fear that in the present state of our wardrobe the allegorical figures might give rise to some rather doubtful allusions and jests. Of course, if you like to make the piece or get it made I have nothing to say against it, but I must really beg you to dispense with all assistance from me."

Melina began to make excuses: the Count had only mentioned this as something approaching what he wanted:

the entire arrangement of the piece was in fact left in their hands.

"In that case," said Wilhelm, "I shall be only too happy to contribute in any way to the pleasure of such delightful people; and as to my Muse, if she can only stammer the praises of a prince who deserves to be so thoroughly revered, it will be the most agreeable occupation that has ever fallen to her lot. I will think the matter over, and perhaps I may succeed in arranging our little troupe so that at least they may produce some effect."

From that moment Wilhelm's thoughts were eagerly fixed on this commission. Before he went to sleep that night everything was pretty well planned, and early the next morning the outline was finished, the scenes sketched, and some of the principal passages and songs even put into verse and written down.

He then hastened to the Baron, with whom it was necessary to discuss certain points, and at once mentioned his plan. The Baron approved of it highly, but at the same time professed a little surprise: he had certainly heard the Count speaking of quite a different piece the evening before and saying it was to be put into verse according to his own directions.

"It does not seem probable," said Wilhelm, "that his lordship can have intended the piece to be composed exactly according to the sketch he gave Melina. If I am not mistaken he was only giving us a hint as to the line we were to take. A lover and judge of art confides his wishes to the artist, but leaves to him the charge of producing the work."

"By no means," replied the Baron. "His lordship depends on the piece being performed just as he directed,

and in no other way. Your idea has certainly a distant resemblance to his, but if we really mean to carry our point and dissuade the Count from putting his first thoughts in execution, it can only be done by help of the ladies. The Baroness knows how to plan such operations in a masterly style. The question is: will your idea please her; if it does and she takes the matter in hand we are sure of success."

"Yes," said Wilhelm, "and we need their help in more points than this, for I question whether either our members or our wardrobe will be sufficient. I have been reckoning on some pretty children belonging to the house-steward and the valet, whom I saw running about the house."

He then begged the Baron to tell the ladies his plan. He did so and came back quickly with a message that they would like to talk it over with him themselves. That evening when the gentlemen sat down to cards, which on account of the arrival of a certain general was to be a graver matter than usual, they, under pretext of a trifling indisposition, would retire to their rooms. Wilhelm should then be brought to them by a secret staircase and would be able to explain his plan to the greatest advantage. The necessary secrecy would give a double charm to the affair: indeed, he said, the Baroness was looking forward like a child to this *rendezvous*, and all the more because it was to be managed without the Count's knowledge and against his will.

Towards evening at the appointed time, Wilhelm was fetched and cautiously led upstairs. The Baroness came to meet him in a small ante-room and in doing this brought back for a moment the remembrance of former happy days. She took him into the Countess's room, where a series of questions began. The warmth and

eagerness with which he propounded his scheme soon prepossessed them in its favour, and we hope our readers will now allow us briefly to make them acquainted with it also.

It was to be opened by a rustic scene with children dancing; the dance to represent that game in which one child runs round and tries to slip into the place of another. This was to alternate with merry games, and end in a round dance accompanied by cheerful songs. The old harper and Mignon were then to appear; he was to sing various songs in praise of peace, tranquillity, and mirth, and Mignon was to perform her egg-dance.

In the midst of this innocent merry-making they were to be disturbed by the sound of military music, and suddenly attacked by a troop of soldiers. The men were to defend themselves and be overcome, the girls to run away, be overtaken and caught. Everything seems going to ruin in this confusion, when some one (in what character the poet had not yet decided) would come up and restore quiet, by telling them that the commander of the troops was at hand. That hero's character was then to be described in brilliant terms, security guaranteed them even in the time of war, violence and disorder placed under due restraint and a general festival held in honour of this magnanimous commander.

The ladies were very much pleased with the idea, but maintained that there must be something of an allegorical nature in the piece or the Count would not be satisfied. The Baron proposed that the leader of the attacking troops should be represented as the genius of discord and violence, and that Minerva should appear to put him in chains, announce the advent of the hero, and proclaim his praises. The Baroness undertook the

business of persuading his lordship that, with only a few alterations, it was his own piece that was going to be performed; but she did so only on one condition: that the bust, the interlaced initials, and the prince's coronet should appear at the end of the piece, without which all her mediation would be useless.

Wilhelm, who in spirit already heard the well-turned praises of his hero issuing from Minerva's lips, was not easy to persuade on this point; but the force brought to bear upon him was of a most agreeable kind. The Countess's beautiful eyes and charming manner could have easily moved him to renounce not only his best inventions, but even the unity he so longed for in his compositions, with all the appropriate details, and thus to sin against his poet's conscience. A very hard struggle too was in store for his conscience as a citizen; for when they came to discuss the distribution of the parts, the ladies insisted on his taking one.

Laertes was to have the fierce war-god for his share; Wilhelm, the leader of the peasants who had some pretty verses full of feeling to say. After resisting some time, he was forced to yield the point; indeed every ground of excuse was cut away, for the Baroness represented to him that a stage erected in their own castle could only be looked upon as a private theatre, and that she herself, if they could only introduce her suitably, would have been pleased to act with the rest. The two ladies then released our friend with many marks of kindness, the Baroness assuring him that he was an incomparable man, accompanying him as far as the private staircase and giving him her hand as she wished him good-night.

CHAPTER VII.

THE undisguised interest taken by these ladies in the matter excited Wilhelm and put fresh life into his plan, which besides, from the rehearsal he had given of it to them on the past evening, had become more vividly present to his own mind than before. He spent the greater part of that night and the next morning in putting the dialogue and songs most carefully into verse. He had nearly finished when he was sent for again to the great house: the company, who were at luncheon, wishing to see him. As he went into the room the Baroness was again the first to come forward, and under pretence of wishing him good-morning, whispered secretly: "Say nothing about your piece except what you are asked."

"I hear," the Count called out to him, "that you are working very diligently at my introductory piece—the one which I intend to give in honour of the Prince. Now I have no objection to your introducing a Minerva, but I should like to consider in good time how the goddess is to be robed, lest we should in any way offend against the laws of costume. For this purpose I have given orders that every book in my library containing a drawing of her shall be brought here."

As he spoke some servants entered with great baskets containing books of every size and shape.

Montfaucon—different collections of antique statues, gems, and coins—all kinds of works on mythology were opened, examined, and their illustrations compared. But even this was not enough. The Count's wonderful memory suggested to him other Minervas to be found on title-pages, in vignettes and elsewhere. Book after book

was brought until at last he literally sat in the midst of a huge heap.

When he really could remember no more Minervas he burst out laughing and exclaimed: "I would lay a wager now that there is not one single Minerva left in the whole library, and I should say it was the first time that any collection of books was so completely deprived of its patron goddess."

They were all amused at this notion; Jarno indeed, who had been perpetually inciting the Count to have more books brought in, laughed immoderately.

"Now," said the Count, turning to Wilhelm, "it is of the greatest importance which goddess you mean to have. Is it to be Minerva or Pallas—the goddess of war or of art?"

"Would it not be well, your Excellency," said Wilhelm, "to leave the point in uncertainty, and as she plays a double part in mythology to assign her a double part here also. She announces a warrior, but only to calm the people; she praises a hero, by exalting his humanity, and overcomes lawless violence to restore peace and happiness."

Here the baroness began to be so frightened lest Wilhelm should betray himself that she interrupted him by pushing forward the Countess's tailor, who was to give his opinion as to the best way of making an antique garment. This man had had much experience in fancy costumes, and as Madame Melina had undertaken the part of the heavenly virgin, he was ordered to take her measure, the Countess, somewhat to the displeasure of her own maids, pointing out what dresses in her wardrobe were to be cut up for the occasion.

The Baroness cleverly contrived to get rid of Wilhelm, and soon after sent him word that she had arranged everything. She also sent him the musician who led

the Count's private band, and who was either to compose the necessary music or to choose and adapt suitable melodies from the stores already in the castle. Things now were in the best train that could possibly be wished and the Count made no further enquiries about the piece, but occupied himself principally with the transparency which was to surprise the spectators at its conclusion. His own inventive powers, and the skill of his confectioner really produced a very pretty illumination, for as he had seen some of the most splendid exhibitions of this kind on his travels and had brought home various illustrative engravings and drawings, he well understood how to direct its arrangement in the best taste.

Meanwhile Wilhelm finished the piece, allotted every one his part and took his own; the band-master, who thoroughly understood dance-music, arranged a ballet, and the whole thing was going on as well as it possibly could.

But one unexpected hindrance threatened to make a terrible gap in his plans. He had promised himself the greatest effect from Mignon's egg-dance, but to his surprise the child, in her own dry way, refused to dance it, insisting that she belonged to him now and never meant to go on the stage again. He used every kind of persuasion at first until she began to cry bitterly, and threw herself at his feet, saying, "Dear father, do stay away from the boards, yourself, too." He then left off trying to persuade her, but did not heed her hint and only turned his thoughts to discovering some other method of making the scene interesting.

Philine, who was to be a peasant-girl and to sing the solos and the verses which the chorus were to repeat after her in the dance, was in the wildest spirits. Indeed at present her life was quite to her taste; she had

a room to herself and was constantly with the Countess, who was amused by her nonsense, and rewarded her every day with some fresh present. A dress too was being got ready for her appearance in the new piece. Her volatile nature could easily imitate others and in her constant intercourse with ladies she soon learnt by heart all that was suitable for a girl in her position, and became a model of good breeding and pretty behaviour. The *Stallmeister's* attentions rather increased than diminished. The officers too were not backward; and finding herself so plentifully supplied with admirers, it came into her head to play the prude for once and practise herself cleverly in the airs of a great lady. She was so cool and sharp that she soon discovered the weak side of every one in the house, and if it had been possible for her to act with any steadfast purpose she might have made her fortune easily enough. But no, she used her advantages here as elsewhere, to gain present pleasure, lead a merry life and enable her to be impertinent when she saw that no danger was likely to follow.

The parts were learnt and a general rehearsal was ordered. The Count meant to be present, and the Countess began to feel uneasy as to how he would take it; for in fact, not a vestige of his own original idea had been left in the piece. Jarno happening to come in as they were discussing the matter, was let into the secret. Their plans amused him so much that he felt inclined to offer his services to the ladies. "Matters must come to a very bad pass indeed, Countess," he said, "if you are not able to get out of this affair unassisted; still, whatever happens, I shall lie in ambush ready." The Baroness then told them that the Count had really heard the whole piece from her, but that as she had related it in a fragmentary style and not in any regular order, though he was

acquainted with each separate detail, he certainly believed that the whole would somehow fit in with his original idea. "But this evening," she said, "I will sit by him and try to divert his attention. I have had the confectioner up already and told him that though of course he must make the transparency very beautiful, he can leave some trifle or other unfinished, just for to-night."

"I could tell you of a court," said Jarno, "where we sadly need such clever energetic friends as you are. Well, remember that when your own devices cease to work you have only to make a sign to me; I will fetch the Count out of the room and not let him come back until Minerva appears and immediate succour may be looked for from the illumination. For the last few days I have had something to tell him that concerns his cousin and have put it off for different reasons. The news will certainly distract his thoughts, though perhaps not in the most agreeable way."

Some business prevented the Count from being present at the beginning of the rehearsal, when he came the baroness entertained him and so Jarno's help was not necessary. Then there was so much to be set right, corrected, and arranged, that the Count forgot himself and his own idea, and as Madame Melina's speech was just what he wished and the transparency very good, he seemed perfectly satisfied. Not till all was over and they were sitting down to cards did he begin to think whether the piece had really been his own invention after all. At this crisis the signal was given and Jarno came forth out of his ambush; the evening passed on, reports of the Prince's approach were confirmed, some of the party rode out to see his vanguard encamping in the neighbourhood, the house was full of noise and commotion and our poor actors, who were not always very

well provided for by the reluctant servants, passed the time in their old castle, unthought of and uncared for, practising their parts and full of expectation.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT last the Prince came: the general officers, his staff and retinue who arrived at the same time and the great numbers of people who came either on business or as visitors gave the castle the appearance of a hive of bees about to swarm. Everyone thronged to see this renowned prince, and was astonished to find him so courteous and condescending; they had not expected that a hero and great military commander could be at the same time a finished courtier.

It was the Count's command that every member of the household should be at his post when the Prince arrived; on the other hand not a single actor durst show his face, as the guest was to have no idea beforehand of the surprise intended for him. The Count's end was completely attained, for when in the evening the Prince was led into the brilliantly lighted old hall hung with tapestry of the last century, he seemed totally unprepared for a theatrical performance of any kind, least of all for one specially got up in his own honour. Everything went off well, and when the play was over the whole company had to come forward and pass in review before the Prince, who had a kind question or a pleasant word for each. Wilhelm, as the author, was separately presented and received his share of praise.

But no one asked any questions especially relating to this introductory piece, and in a few days it was as if nothing of the kind had been given, except that Jarno

now and then praised it very sensibly to Wilhelm. He would add however: "It's a pity that you're staking hollow nuts to win hollow nuts." Wilhelm pondered on these strange words for days after and could not tell what he was meant to understand from them.

Meanwhile the company acted every evening, exerting all their powers to draw and fix the attention of the audience. The applause was greater than they deserved, but it encouraged them; and there, in their old castle, they really believed themselves the point of attraction to this large concourse of people, fancied that the many strangers flocked to see *their* performances, and that they were the centre round which everything moved.

Wilhelm alone, to his great vexation, saw that in reality the contrary was the case. For though the Prince had paid the most conscientious attention to the whole of their first representation, not moving from his chair once during the entire performance, he seemed now to be gradually and in the most polite manner finding excuses for absenting himself from the subsequent ones. Just the very people, Jarno at their head, in whose conversation Wilhelm had found the most sense and intelligence, were those who only paid the shortest visits to their theatre and spent the remainder of the time in an adjoining room either at cards or in talking over business matters.

It annoyed Wilhelm extremely that with the most persevering efforts he could not secure the applause of those he most wished to please. In choosing the pieces to be acted and copying out the parts, in the frequent rehearsals and all else he was Melina's constant and unwearied helper; indeed, though he did not confess it, the latter soon discovered his own insufficiency and left him to do what he pleased. Wilhelm learnt his own parts

most carefully and acted them with great feeling and life, and with as much grace and manner as the little cultivation he had been able to bestow on himself would allow.

As to the others, any doubts they might have felt would have been entirely removed by the Baron's unflagging interest and his assurances that they were producing the greatest effect, especially when they acted one of his own pieces: he only regretted that the Prince had such an exclusive liking for the French drama and that some of his retinue, Jarno for instance particularly, actually felt a passionate preference for the monstrous productions of the English stage.

But though, as we have just said, the admiration bestowed on the artistic skill of our actors was not of the best kind, they themselves were not subjects of total indifference to the spectators. We have already mentioned that the actresses, even from the first, attracted the attention of the younger officers; but this was not all; more important conquests followed in their train. Of these however, we will not speak, and only mention that the Countess's interest in Wilhelm increased from day to day, and that a quiet affection for her seemed to be springing up in his heart too. When he was on the stage she could look at no one else; and it was not long before his acting and declamation seemed meant for her alone. Simply to look at one another was an unspeakable delight to which they yielded without reserve and without indulging a wish beyond or harbouring a fear of consequences.

Just as the outposts of two hostile armies might talk quietly and pleasantly across a river without thinking of the war in which their respective parties were engaged, so Wilhelm and the Countess exchanged looks full of

meaning across the tremendous chasm of birth and rank that separated them, and neither doubted for a moment that the indulgence of such feelings was allowable.

The Baroness meanwhile, had picked out Laertes as a gay, high-spirited young fellow who took her fancy. He, woman-hater as he was, did not disdain a passing adventure and this time would really have been taken captive against his will by her affability and fascinating manners, had not the Baron, quite by chance, done him a good or a bad service, whichever you may like to call it, by giving him a nearer insight into the real state of her feelings.

One day when Laertes was loud in her praises and preferring her before her entire sex, the Baron answered in a jesting tone: "I see how matters are; our dear friend has gained another inmate for her sties." This unfortunate comparison which hinted only too clearly at the dangerous caresses of Circe, annoyed Laertes beyond measure, so much so that he could hardly listen with patience to the remorseless Baron as he went on: "Every stranger fancies he must be the first at whom this agreeable behaviour has been aimed; but he makes a tremendous mistake; we've all been taken in in the same way: man, youth, or boy, every one submits for a time, becomes her devoted follower and longs and strives to please her."

To a happy man just entering an enchantress's garden, welcomed by the delicious sights and sounds of an artificial spring and listening to the first notes of the nightingale, there could not be a more unpleasant surprise than to be suddenly greeted by the unexpected grunt of one of his metamorphosed predecessors.

Laertes was heartily ashamed at discovering that his vanity had once more misled him into entertaining the very

faintest good opinion of any woman whatever. From that moment he ceased to pay the Baroness the slightest attention, and became the *Stallmeister's* constant companion, practising fencing and going out hunting with him assiduously, but behaving at the rehearsals and representations as if they were only secondary matters.

The Count and Countess would sometimes send for one or another of the company in the morning, and they all found reason to envy Philine's most undeserved good fortune. The Count too would often have his favourite, the Pedant, for hours at his toilet, and by degrees the man was entirely equipped even to a watch and snuff-box.

Occasionally too the entire company would be sent for after dinner, and this they looked on as a great honour, not observing that the same time was chosen for the keepers and men-servants to bring in a number of dogs, and lead the horses round the court to be looked at.

Some one had advised Wilhelm by all means to take an opportunity of praising the Prince's favourite poet Racine, and so bringing himself into favourable notice with his Highness. He found a good opportunity for following this advice on one of these very afternoons when he had been sent for with the others and the prince asked if he was in the habit of studying the great French dramatic poets. Wilhelm answered eagerly "Yes," and not seeing that the Prince, without waiting for his answer, was just turning to address some one else, caught at his words and almost stepped before him to say how highly he appreciated the French drama and with what rapture he had read the works of their great masters: it had given him unfeigned pleasure to hear that the prince did perfect justice to the great talents of Racine. "I can quite

understand," he went on, "how persons of high rank must appreciate a poet who describes so well and correctly the more exalted conditions in which their life is passed. If I might venture to say so, Corneille has described great men, and Racine men of rank and breeding. When I read his plays I can always imagine the poet living at a brilliant court, with a great king always before his eyes, consorting with the best and highest, and peering into those secrets of humanity which hide themselves behind costly tapestries; and when I study his *Britannicus* or his *Berenice* I feel myself at the court, and initiated into all the great and petty affairs that take place in those dwellings of the terrestrial gods: through the eyes of this sensitive Frenchman I behold kings who are worshipped by an entire nation, and courtiers who are objects of envy to thousands, in their natural character. I see their failings and their sufferings. The story that Racine died of a broken heart because Louis XIV. had ceased to notice him and had allowed him to feel his displeasure, is in my mind the key to all he has written, and it is impossible that a poet of such talent, to whom a king's glance was life or death, should not produce plays which must deserve a king's and a prince's approval."

Jarno meanwhile had come up to them and was listening in astonishment. The Prince gave no answer beyond a friendly nod of approval and turned away, though Wilhelm, who had no idea that it was a want of good breeding to pursue a conversation and attempt to exhaust a subject under such circumstances, would fain have gone on to prove further that he had neither read the Prince's favourite poet with indifference nor in vain.

"Have you never," said Jarno, taking him on one side, "seen one of Shakespeare's plays?"

"No," said Wilhelm, "for since they have been better known in Germany I have had very little to do with the stage, and I really don't know whether I ought to be glad that chance has led me to revive my old hobby now. Besides, what I have heard of his plays has not made me wish to be better acquainted with such strange monstrosities. They seem to overstep the boundaries of all probability and decency."

"Well," said the other, "I would advise you nevertheless to make the trial. It can't do you any harm to see even what is strange and odd with your own eyes. I will lend you one or two volumes, and you can't spend the time better in your lonely room in that old castle than in getting rid of everything else and taking a good look into the magic lantern of this unknown world. It really is a sin for you to be wasting your time in dressing up these monkeys to look a little more like men, and teaching dogs to dance. I've only one condition to make; and that is that you don't take offence at the form; all the rest I can safely leave to your own correct judgment."

The horses were at the door; Jarno mounted with some friends, and they started on a hunting-party. Wilhelm looked sadly after him. He would have so much enjoyed a longer conversation with this man; for, though in a somewhat unfriendly fashion, he gave him new ideas, and ideas which he needed.

During the gradual development of our powers faculties and ideas, it sometimes happens that we get into a difficulty out of which a friend could easily help us. A man in such a case is like a wanderer who falls into the water not far from his destined shelter; if laid hold of at once and dragged out by a friendly hand, a simple wetting would be the result, whereas; left to himself, he will probably struggle out on the opposite shore, and be

forced to make a circuitous and tiring pilgrimage before he reaches his destination.

Wilhelm began to have a notion that the world did not always go on as he had fancied. He saw the significant, important life of these great people near at hand, and wondered at the easy air they threw into it. An army on the march, a princely hero at its head, the many co-operating generals, officers, soldiers, the multitude eager to testify their veneration, all this raised and widened his imaginative powers. Such was the frame of mind in which he received the promised books and one may easily foresee that in a short time he was carried away by the stream of that great genius towards a boundless ocean where he entirely lost and forgot himself.

CHAPTER IX.

THE relation in which the Baron stood to the actors had undergone various changes during their residence in the old castle. In the beginning it had been mutually satisfactory, and on seeing for the first time in his life a piece of his own which had never before exercised its enlivening powers beyond the limits of an amateur theatre, in the hands of real actors and on its way to respectable performance, the Baron was in the best humour. He took a generous turn, bought many a little present for the actresses from the numerous sellers of fancy wares who flocked to the castle and managed to get many an extra bottle of champagne for the actors. They in their turn, took great pains with his pieces and Wilhelm spared himself no trouble in learning most carefully the magnificent speeches of the excellent hero whose part had fallen to him.

Still disagreements had by degrees crept in. The Baron's partiality for particular actors grew more obvious every day, and of course annoyed the others. His preferences too were so exclusive that the company became divided by jealousy. Melina, always thoroughly helpless in vexed questions, was now in a very distressing plight. The Baron's favourites accepted his praises without evincing any special gratitude, while the neglected ones took every means of showing their annoyance and making their formerly revered patron thoroughly uncomfortable when he paid them a visit. It was no small nourishment for their mischievous joy to hear that a certain poem, of which no one knew the author, had made a good deal of noise in the other castle. The Baron's constant intercourse with the comedians had already been criticised by his friends, within the bounds of due politeness of course, but stories of all kinds had been told about him, and little occurrences dressed up to look laughable and amusing. At last the story ran that a kind of professional jealousy had sprung up between him and certain of the actors who also fancied themselves authors, and this report was the foundation of the song we spoke of. It ran as follows:

"I'm but a poor devil, and envy my Lord,
For his place in the world and his seat near the throne.
His game, his preserves, and his acres so broad,
And his castle descending from father to son.

"But though a poor devil, my Lord envies me,
Because old mother Nature was kind at my birth;
And instead of his gold and his acres in fee,
She gave me some brains—and not quite without worth.

"Now it strikes me, my Lord, that we'd better agree
To remain where we are, without envy or hate.
I'm quite willing to leave you your acres in fee—
But don't try on Parnassus besides to hold state."

Several almost illegible copies of this poem had been found in the hands of different people, and opinions on the matter were greatly divided. As to the author, no one seemed able even to hazard a conjecture; and when they began to amuse themselves over it with a kind of malicious pleasure Wilhelm declared his opposition decidedly.

"We Germans," he exclaimed, "deserve that our literature and poetry should continue to be held in the contempt under which they have so long languished, if we do not know how (30) appreciate men of rank who take an interest in letters. Birth, rank, and fortune stand in no contradiction with genius and taste; foreign nations have taught us that; many of their cleverest men are from the upper classes, and though hitherto it has been a marvel in Germany to see a man of rank devote himself to letters and very few celebrated men have increased their celebrity by any taste for art or science, while on the other hand many a name has risen out of darkness and appeared as an unknown star on our horizon, it will not always be so, and I am much mistaken if the highest class in our own nation is not beginning to use its privileges as means for carrying off the best laurels the Muses have to bestow. Just for these reasons there is nothing more unpleasant to me than to hear not only men of the middle class ridiculing a nobleman who values literature, but one in the same rank of life inconsiderately giving way to a mere caprice and taking a mischievous and most unjustifiable delight in scaring his equal from a path where honour and satisfaction lie waiting for all."

This last remark was apparently directed at the Count who, Wilhelm heard, had been pleased with the poem. Indeed he was accustomed to banter the Baron

in his own fashion, and it must be confessed was not sorry to have an opportunity of tormenting him more effectually. Everyone had his own suspicions as to the writer of the song; and the Count, who was not fond of being surpassed in penetration, hit upon an idea which he was very soon ready to swear to: the song could only have been written by his Pedant: he was a very sharp fellow, and this was not by any means the first time he had shown a talent for poetry. So, to give himself a thorough treat, he sent for this man one morning, and in presence of the Countess, Baroness, and Jarno, made him read the song aloud in his own peculiar way; for which performance he received praise, applause, and a present, at the same time managing very cleverly to evade the Count's question as to whether he possessed any poems written by himself in former years. In this way the Pedant gained the reputation of being a poet and a wit with the one party, and with the other a bad, libellous fellow. On the stage the Count applauded him more and more, however he might be acting, so that the poor creature became puffed up, hardly knew what he was doing, and began planning to get a room in the new castle like Philine.

If his plan could have been carried out at once, the poor Pedant might have escaped a terrible misfortune. For one evening, as he was groping his way in the dark along the narrow and uneven paths that led to the old castle, he was attacked and held fast by a number of men, while others so unmercifully beat and belaboured him that he could hardly move from the place, and with the greatest difficulty crept up to his companions. They professed the greatest indignation outwardly, but found it very difficult to restrain their laughter, so thoroughly becudgelled was his appearance, and his new brown coat

stained, dusty, and covered all over with white as though he had been in a fray with some millers.

On hearing of this affair the Count was indignant beyond measure. He treated it as one of the greatest crimes, called it an infringement of the rights of sanctuary pertaining to the castle, and had the strictest enquiries set on foot by his lawyer. The whitened coat was to serve as an important means of detection, and every person in the castle who could have had to do with flour or hair-powder was examined: all in vain.

The Baron protested solemnly on his honour that, though certainly the jest had annoyed him at the time and he had not thought his lordship's conduct in the matter the most friendly, he had disregarded it; and as to the poet or lampoon-writer (whichever they chose to call him), he knew nothing at all about the misfortune that had befallen him.

Owing to the movements of the many strangers still at the castle, and the commotion prevailing there, this matter was soon forgotten, and the unlucky favourite had to pay dearly for the short-lived pleasure of wearing borrowed plumes.

The actors continued to play every evening and were on the whole very well treated, but they began to be discontented, and the better the fare the more exorbitant grew their demands. Soon neither food, lodging, nor attendance were good enough for them, and they beset their protector, the Baron, with entreaties that he would see they were better cared for and procure them the pleasures and comforts he had promised so long. Their importunate complaints grew louder and louder, and their friend, with all his efforts, found himself less and less able to satisfy them.

During this time Wilhelm was scarcely ever to be

seen, except at the rehearsals and representations. Locked into a distant room at the back of the old castle to which only Mignon and the old harper were allowed free access, he was living entirely in Shakespeare's world and conscious of nothing outside himself.

We sometimes hear stories of magicians who by uttering a magic formula bring crowds of spirits of all kinds and shapes into their chamber. The spells are so powerful that the room is soon entirely filled; the spirits throng and press up to the limits set them by a small drawn circle, round which and above the head of their master they multiply and increase continually, hovering and circling in a perpetual state of transformation. Every corner is crowded, every shelf and ledge thickly covered with them. Eggs expand, and giant statures shrivel into mushrooms. But alas, the necromancer has forgotten the word by which this spirit-flood could be made to ebb.—This is a picture of Wilhelm as he sat reading Shakespeare. Thousands of feelings and powers, of whose existence he had not had the faintest idea hitherto, awoke and stirred within him strangely. Nothing had power to draw him out of this condition, and he was much annoyed if any one seized an opportunity of coming in to tell him what was passing in the outer world.

Thus, when one day a report reached him that a boy had been taken up on suspicion of trying to break into the house at night, and, as he was dressed like a periwig-maker was also suspected of having had a hand in powdering the pedant's coat, and was to be publicly flogged in the castle-courtyard, he scarcely paid any attention. The boy, they said, denied so obstinately having had anything to do with the affair that it was not possible to punish him in due form, but he was to receive a reward

for his vagrancy which he would not easily forget and then be sent about his business: he had been prowling about the neighbourhood by day, sleeping in the mills at night, and at last had actually set a ladder against the garden wall and climbed over.

Wilhelm could see nothing remarkable in this affair until Mignon suddenly rushed into the room, declaring that it was Friedrich, who had been lost ever since the affair with the *Stallmeister*.

This roused his interest at once, and he went quickly down to the courtyard where preparations were already being made, as, even in such matters, the Count was fond of ceremony. The boy was brought in, Wilhelm interfered and begged that the proceedings might be put a stop to, as he knew the boy and wished to say something in his behalf. It was a difficult matter to get heard, but at last he gained permission to speak with the criminal alone. The boy assured him that he knew nothing at all about the affair in which they told him one of the actors had been so roughly treated: he had only been wandering about the castle, and had crept in at night to try and find Philine's room: he knew whereabouts it was, and should certainly have hit upon it if he had not been caught.

For the honour of his own party Wilhelm did not like this story to come abroad; so he went to the *Stallmeister* and asked him whether, knowing the house and the people so well as he did, he could not do something to get the boy set at liberty. The whimsical man, with Wilhelm's help, at once concocted the following little story: the boy had once belonged to the troupe but had run away; he now wanted to be taken on again, and his plan had been to try and find some of his friends at night-time and enlist them in his favour. It was further

proved that his former conduct had been good: the ladies interfered in his favour and he was dismissed.

Wilhelm took mercy on him, and he became a third in that remarkable little family which our friend for some time had looked upon as his own. The old man and Mignon received the returned runaway kindly, and all three agreed in trying to serve their friend and protector attentively and give him pleasure.

CHAPTER X.

MEANWHILE Philine managed to ingratiate herself daily more and more into the good graces of the ladies. When they were alone she generally turned the conversation on to the men whom they were in the habit of seeing, and Wilhelm was by no means the last to come under discussion. The shrewd girl saw that he had made a deep impression on the Countess, and told all that she knew about him with a good deal that she did not know; took good care not to relate a single thing that could be interpreted to his disadvantage, and praised his nobleness of mind, liberality, and especially the great modesty of his manner towards women. Any questions that were put to her she answered very cleverly, and this discovery of her beautiful friend's increasing *penchant* for Wilhelm was by no means unwelcome to the Baroness. She knew that the relation in which she herself stood to many of the men, and more especially during the last few days to Jarno, had been perceived by the Countess, whose great purity of feeling led her to disapprove and even, though with great gentleness, to blame such frivolous conduct.

Thus the Baroness and Philine had each their separate interest in bringing the Countess and Wilhelm together,

over and above which Philine hoped to work a little for herself by the way, and if possible win back the favour she had lost in Wilhelm's eyes.

One day, when the Count with the rest of the party had gone on a hunting expedition from which they were not expected back until the next morning, the baroness planned a jest entirely in keeping with her own character. She was very fond of all kinds of disguises, and would often surprise the company at the castle by dressing up as a peasant girl, a page, or a huntsman's boy. By doing this she made the impression of a little fairy, everywhere present, and when least expected. Nothing could exceed her delight when she really succeeded in deceiving the company for a time, by waiting on them as a servant, or in some other disguise, and then at last playfully revealing herself.

Towards evening she sent for Wilhelm to her room, and having still something to do, told Philine to prepare him for what was coming.

He arrived, and to his great surprise instead of the two ladies there was this frivolous girl. She met him however with a well-bred frankness of manner which she had been practising, and which compelled him to the same politeness.

She began by joking him about the good fortune which seemed to follow him everywhere and which, she said, it was easy to perceive had brought him hither now; then she made him a few agreeable reproaches on his behaviour to herself and the pain it had caused her, at the same time scolding and accusing herself, and confessing that she had deserved nothing better; she ended by giving a candid description of what she chose to call her *past* state, adding that she should despise herself if she were not capable of becoming more worthy of his friendship.

Wilhelm was struck by this speech. He had too little acquaintance with the world to know that just the most thoughtless people and those who are least capable of improvement are often the loudest in self accusation, acknowledging and lamenting their faults with the greatest candour, but possessed of not the slightest power to turn from the error of that way down which their too powerful natures are dragging them. In ignorance of this, he could not remain severe to the graceful sinner before him, allowed himself to enter into conversation with her, and then heard the proposal of a strange disguise with which the beautiful Countess was to be surprised.

He felt some scruples on the matter and mentioned them to Philine, but the Baroness coming in at that moment left him no time for reflection, and hurried him away, saying the right moment had arrived.

It was dark; she took him into the Count's dressing-room; there she made him take off his own coat and slip into his lordship's silk dressing-gown; she put the red bordered smoking cap on his head, led him into his lordship's cabinet and bade him seat himself in the easy chair and take a book. With her own hands she lighted the Argand lamp that stood on the table before him, and then instructed him in the part he was to play.

The Countess, she said, was to be told that her husband had returned unexpectedly in a bad humour; on hearing this she would come in, and after walking once or twice up and down the room would seat herself on the arm of his chair, lay her hand on his shoulder and say a few words to him. Wilhelm was to play the husband's part as long and as well as he possibly could, and behave very prettily and gallantly when obliged to reveal himself.

He sat most uneasily in this strange mask. The

proposal had taken him by surprise, and the thing was done before he had had time to consider. The Baroness was already out of the room before he noticed what a dangerous post he was occupying. He could not deny that the Countess's youth, beauty, and grace had made some impression on his heart, but empty gallantry was completely foreign to his nature, and as his principles forbade anything more earnest he felt at this moment greatly perplexed. He was as much afraid of pleasing the Countess too much as of displeasing her.

Every womanly charm that had yet had any influence over him rose before his imagination. Mariana appeared dressed in white and begged him not to forget her. Philine's presence, a few moments before, had revived the remembrance of her pleasant ways, her beautiful hair, and coaxing manner; but these faded away in the distance when he thought of that noble Countess, lovely as a flower, whose arm would be round his neck in a few minutes, and whose innocent caresses he was required to return.

He certainly little guessed in what a remarkable way he was to be delivered from all his perplexities, and his wonder and terror were great when he saw the door behind him open, and, casting a stolen glance in the opposite mirror, clearly perceived the Count himself coming in with a light. His doubts whether to rise, fly, confess, deny, or entreat forgiveness lasted only a few seconds; the Count, who had remained motionless in the doorway, went back, shutting the door softly behind him. In the same moment the Baroness rushed in by another door, put out the lamp, pulled Wilhelm out of the chair, and dragged him after her into the dressing-room. In a moment the dressing-gown was off and in its usual place; and throwing Wilhelm's coat over her arm she hastened

with him through a number of rooms, passages, and partitions to her own apartment; there, when she had recovered sufficiently to speak, Wilhelm heard that on her telling the Countess the pretended news about the Count's return she had answered: "Yes, I know it already; what can have happened? I have just seen him ride through the side gate:" on hearing which the terrified Baroness had flown out of the room to fetch Wilhelm away.

"But unfortunately you came too late; the Count came in and saw me sitting there."

"Did he recognise you?"

"I don't know. We saw one another in the mirror, and before I could tell whether it was an apparition or himself he was gone and had shut the door behind him."

While they were talking a servant came to call the Baroness, and increased her embarrassment by saying that the Count was with his lady. With a heavy heart she obeyed, and was surprised to find him, though very quiet and absorbed in thought, gentler and kinder in his expressions than usual. She could not tell what to think. They talked of what had happened during the hunt and the reason of his unexpected return, but the conversation soon flagged. The Count was quiet, and the Baroness was especially surprised by his asking for Wilhelm and saying he should wish him fetched to read something aloud.

Wilhelm, who had meanwhile finished dressing and somewhat regained his senses in the Baroness's room, appeared at this summons, though not without great trepidation. The Count gave him a book and he read them a sensation story out of it, but his anxiety was so great that it gave an uncertain, trembling tone to his voice. This, fortunately, suited the tale; the Count occasionally

gave signs of approval, and on dismissing our friend praised the remarkably expressive way in which he had read.

CHAPTER XI.

WILHELM had scarcely read even a few of Shakespeare's plays before the effect on his mind was so great that he could not read further. His whole soul was moved. He sought an opportunity of speaking to Jarno, and could not find words sufficient to express his thanks for the delight he had procured him.

"I felt sure," answered Jarno, "that you could not remain indifferent to Shakespeare's glorious works. He is the most extraordinary and wonderful of writers."

"No," said Wilhelm, "I never remember any book, person, or event producing such an effect on me as these exquisite plays have done; and it is through your kindness that I have learnt to know them. They seem to be the work of a heavenly genius drawing near to men to teach them self-knowledge in the gentlest way. These are no mere made-up poems! When you are reading them you seem to be standing before the tremendous book of Fate. It lies open, and its leaves are being mightily and quickly blown backwards and forwards by the rushing, howling tempests of the most disturbed human lives. I have been so astonished, so lost in wonder, at the strength and gentleness, the power and calmness of this man that I eagerly long for the time to come when I shall be in a condition to read more."

"Bravo!" said Jarno, giving Wilhelm a hearty shake of the hand. "That is just what I wanted to see; and the results which I am also looking forward to will be sure to follow."

"I only wish," said Wilhelm, "that I *could* reveal to you all that is now passing in my mind. All the ideas and presentiments that I have ever felt with regard to humanity and its destinies, ideas that, unknown to myself, have accompanied me from my youth up till now, I find fulfilled and unravelled in Shakespeare's plays. It is as if he solved every mystery without your being able to say of any one sentence: 'There is the solution.' His characters seem to be, and yet are not, natural men and women. The most mysterious and composite productions of nature act before us in his plays like clocks with crystal dial-plates and cases. They shew, as they were meant to, the course of the hours, but at the same time you can see the wheels and springs that set and keep them in motion. The few glances I have had into this world of Shakespeare's have stirred me up, more than anything else has ever done, to make a more rapid onward progress in the real world, to plunge into the tide of destinies decreed for it, and then some day—if I should succeed in my design—to draw at least a few cupfuls out of the great ocean of true nature, and dispense them from the stage of a theatre to the thirsty, panting public of my native country."

"I am very glad to find you in this frame of mind," said Jarno, laying his hand on the shoulder of the excited youth. "Hold fast to that resolution of entering on an active life, and don't put off using well and bravely the good years that lie before you. If I can help you in any way I will with all my heart. I have never asked you how you got into this set of strolling players, for which you seem neither to have been born nor brought up; but this much I hope and see: you long to be away from them. I know nothing either of your family or your home life: don't tell me more than on reflection you would wish to.

One thing I can tell you; times of war such as we live in often give rise to very sudden changes of fortune; if you would like to devote your powers and talents to our service, and are not afraid of trouble, or even, if necessary of danger, I have an opportunity at present of putting you into a post which you will never repent having filled for a time."

Wilhelm could not sufficiently express his thanks, and was ready at once to tell this friend and patron the whole history of his life.

During this conversation they had wandered far into the park and had reached the highway which crossed it. Jarno stood still a moment, and said: "Think over my proposal, make up your mind, give me an answer in a few days, and place confidence in me. I assure you that it has been quite incomprehensible to me how you could have anything in common with such a set, and I have often been annoyed and disgusted at seeing that in order to make life at all bearable you have been forced to set your heart on a strolling ballad-singer and a silly creature neither girl nor boy."

He had not finished speaking when an officer rode up hastily, followed by a groom with a led horse. Jarno shouted out an eager greeting and the officer sprang from his horse. They embraced and began a conversation, Wilhelm standing by lost in perplexity and dismay at the words his military friend had just made use of. Jarno looked through a few papers given him by the other, and while he was doing so the new-comer went up to Wilhelm and gave him his hand, saying with emphasis: "I meet you in good company; follow the advice of your friend; in so doing you will also be fulfilling the wishes of one who, though a stranger to you, takes a deep interest in your welfare." So saying he

embraced Wilhelm warmly and pressed him to his heart. At the same moment Jarno came up and said to the stranger, "I had better ride in with you at once; you can then get the necessary orders and start again before night." They both jumped into their saddles and left our astonished friend to his own meditations.

Jarno's last words were still ringing in his ears. It was intolerable to hear two human beings who had won his affection in the most innocent manner spoken of in such degrading terms by a man he respected so highly. The unknown officer's strange embrace made little impression on him; it only occupied his imagination and curiosity a moment; but Jarno's words had gone to his heart; he felt deeply wounded, and on his way home reproached himself bitterly for having, for even one single moment, forgotten or mistaken Jarno's hard-hearted coldness, when it could be read in his eyes and his every gesture.

"No!" he cried, "you only fancy, *blasé* man of the world as you are, that you can be a friend. Why all that you could offer is not to be put in comparison with the feeling that binds me to those two unfortunate creatures. What a blessing that I have discovered what is to be expected from you in time!"

Mignon came to meet him. He clasped the child in his arms, saying: "No, nothing shall part us, you good little creature. The world's plausible wisdom shall never prevail on me to leave you or forget what I owe you."

As he generally avoided her caresses, Mignon was delighted at the unexpected tenderness, and clung so fast to him that he could hardly get rid of her.

After this, Wilhelm watched Jarno's actions more closely, found many things that he could not praise, and some that he decidedly disapproved of. For instance,

he began strongly to suspect that the song on the Baron, for which the poor Pedant had had to pay so dearly, was Jarno's work. Now the latter had made fun of the affair in Wilhelm's presence, and this seemed to prove a thoroughly depraved heart; for what could be more malicious than to laugh at undeserved sufferings which you yourself have caused, and this without attempting to make the slightest compensation? Wilhelm would have liked to effect this last by his own means, for a strange chance had brought him on the track of the nocturnal rioters who had maltreated the poor Pedant.

Up to that time it had been carefully concealed from Wilhelm that some of the younger officers and a number of actors and actresses were accustomed to spend whole nights amusing themselves in a merry fashion in the saloon on the ground-floor of the old castle. One morning, however, having risen early according to his custom, he chanced to walk into this very room, and there found the young gentlemen performing a most remarkable toilette. They had mixed a quantity of chalk and water in a basin, and were smearing this paste with a brush over their trousers and waistcoats, so as to restore the cleanliness of their apparel in the shortest time and without the trouble of undressing. As he watched them, wondering at this queer trick, the Pedant's whitened coat flashed into his mind, and on discovering that some of these youths were related to the Baron his suspicions grew stronger.

In order to track them more closely he asked them to breakfast; they were in high spirits and full of merry stories. One especially, who had served for a long time in a recruiting regiment, could not say enough in praise of the cunning and active way in which his commanding officer managed to outwit and entrap all kinds of people,

He told them in detail how young men of good families and first-rate education had been deceived by the prospect of a decent maintenance being held out to them, and laughed at the simpletons who had been made so happy at first by the approval and preference of some brave, clever, liberal officer.

How Wilhelm blessed his good genius, as he listened, for having unexpectedly shown him on the edge of what a precipice he was unconsciously walking! From that time he looked on Jarno as nothing but a recruiting-officer, and the stranger's embrace was easily explained. The opinions of such men were abhorrent to him; he avoided every one who wore a uniform, and the news that the army was soon to march would have been very welcome if he had not feared that for him it would be the sentence of perhaps perpetual banishment from his beautiful friend.

CHAPTER XII.

MEANWHILE the Baroness had been passing days of care and unsatisfied curiosity. The Count's behaviour was a perfect riddle to her. His old manner had quite left him; he was never heard to joke as usual, and his demands on society and his servants were much fewer. His old pedantic and domineering ways were rarely to be seen. He was quiet and often absorbed in thought, but cheerful; in short another man. When there was any reading-aloud, which sometimes took place at his own suggestion, he would choose serious or even religious books, and the Baroness lived in perpetual fear lest a hidden grudge should be lying under this apparent calm, and a secret determination to revenge the insult he had so

accidentally discovered. In her anxiety she resolved to take Jarno into her confidence, a thing which she could do all the more easily because their present relation to each other was one in which usually very few secrets are kept. Jarno had not long ago become her most intimate friend, but they were clever enough to hide their affection and happiness from the noisy world around. The only eyes that saw this new romance were those of the Countess, and it was, most likely, in order to avoid the quiet reproaches which she had sometimes to bear from this noble soul, that the Baroness tried to occupy her friend's mind in the same way as her own.

She had scarcely finished telling her story when Jarno burst out laughing and exclaimed: "Why of course the old fellow fancies it was his own ghost! he's afraid the apparition forebodes some misfortune, perhaps even death, and has become tame, like all such half-men when they think of that dissolution which no man ever has and no man ever will escape. Wait a little! as I hope that he's not likely to die just yet we'll take this opportunity of training him, so that at least he shall cease to be a burden to his wife and household."

As soon after this conversation as they could find a fitting opportunity, they began to talk about presentiments, apparitions, and such matters in the Count's presence. Jarno played the unbeliever, the Baroness followed his example, and they pushed the matter so far that at last the Count took Jarno aside, reproved him for his free-thinking speeches, and, to convince him of the possibility and reality of such stories, gave himself as an example. Jarno pretended to be struck, then to waver, and at last to be convinced, but when they were alone the two conspirators made themselves very merry at the expense of this weak man of the world, who had been so quickly converted from

his evil ways by a mere bugbear, and whose only merit consisted in the self-possession with which he looked forward to some coming misfortune—possibly his own death.

“He might not perhaps be quite so prepared for the most natural results of the apparition he saw,” said the Baroness, whose natural gaiety returned the moment any weight was taken from her mind. Jarno was richly rewarded; and the two proceeded to the invention of fresh plans for taming the Count more effectually, and exciting and strengthening the Countess’s fancy for Wilhelm.

With this intention they told her the whole story. At first she appeared vexed and annoyed, but as time went on was often lost in thought and seemed to be pondering over, and tracing out in fancy the scene which they had planned for her.

The preparations now beginning to be made on all sides left no doubt that the armies would soon be on the march and the Prince change his head-quarters. It was not difficult for our actors to predict their own future, and yet Melina was the only one among them who took any corresponding measures; the others only tried to secure the greatest amount of pleasure from every moment as it passed.

Wilhelm meanwhile had his own peculiar task. The Countess had asked for a copy of his works, and this wish from her was to his mind the most delightful reward for all his efforts.

In such cases a young author who has never yet seen himself in print takes the greatest pains to make a neat, fair copy of his own writings. It may be called the golden age of authorship. He sees himself transported into vanished centuries when the press had not yet flooded the world with so much unprofitable literature—when only works of real value were copied, and copied

in order to be treasured up by the noblest men. With these feelings how easily he may draw the false conclusion that a carefully traced manuscript must be a work of real value deserving to be possessed by, and to lie on the shelves of a true critic and patron of letters!

As the Prince's departure grew near it was resolved that a great banquet should be given in his honour. Many ladies from the neighbourhood were invited and the Countess dressed in good time. Her dress was more costly than usual, more pains had been bestowed on her hair and ornaments, and she wore all her jewels. The Baroness too had taken the greatest possible to produce a splendid and tasteful toilet.

Seeing that they grew tired of waiting for their visitors, Philine proposed that Wilhelm should be sent for, as he wished to present his finished manuscript, and read a few more trifles aloud to them. He came, and on entering was astonished at the Countess's wondrous grace and the beauty of her figure, which seemed more striking than ever in this splendid dress. He read aloud as he was desired, but so badly and with such an absent mind that, but for the kind indulgence of his listeners, he would very soon have been dismissed.

Whenever he looked at the Countess it seemed as if an electric spark glittered before his eyes, and at last he could hardly get breath to continue his reading. Her beauty had always given him pleasure; but now it seemed as if he had never seen anything more perfect, and the sum and substance of the thousand and one thoughts which crowded across his mind as he sat reading, was something like the following:

"How foolish it is of many poets and so-called men of feeling to set themselves against splendour and ornament, and to require women of every class to dress in the

simplest and most natural style only! They rail at ornament without reflecting that when our eyes are offended by a plain or ugly person in an expensive striking dress it is not the poor ornaments of her dress that are in fault. I wish I could call all the best judges in the world together at this moment and ask them whether they could spare one fold, one ribbon, or one piece of lace, one single puff or curl or sparkling stone without fearing to mar the wondrously lovely impression which now meets our eyes so naturally and without effort. Yes, I may truly say *naturally*. This goddess seems to have stepped lightly out of the cup of some flower in all her perfect ornaments, just as Minerva sprang fully armed from the head of Jupiter."

He glanced at her often while he was reading, as if he would stamp the wonderful impression on his mind for all eternity; and whereas at other times he would have been in as much despair at the inaccurate reading of a single word or even letter as if it were a disgraceful blunder and spoiled the entire recital, he now made mistakes without the slightest embarrassment.

A false alarm that the guests had arrived put an end to the reading; the Baroness left the room, and the Countess, in shutting up the drawers of her writing-table, took out a little ring-box and put one or two more rings on her fingers. With her eyes still fixed on the little box, she said: "We shall soon part: take this remembrance from a real friend who wishes nothing more earnestly than your future welfare." As she said these words she took another ring out of the box and gave it to Wilhelm. A lock of hair beautifully woven into the form of a little escutcheon lay under a piece of crystal set round with precious stones. Wilhelm took it but he could neither move nor speak in answer; he stood as if rooted to the

spot. The Countess locked her writing-table and sat down on the sofa.

"And I am to have nothing?" said Philine, kneeling down at the Countess's right hand. "Only look at that fellow; he has plenty to say at the wrong time and now he can't even stammer out one miserable word of thanks. Come, sir, take courage! if you can't speak, do your duty at least in dumb show; and if you're wanting in invention to-day, you can imitate me."

And so saying she seized the countess's right hand and kissed it fervently. Wilhelm fell on his knees, took her left hand, and pressed it to his lips. The Countess seemed embarrassed but not angry.

"Ah!" cried Philine; "I may perhaps have seen as many jewels before, but never any lady so fit to wear them. What beautiful bracelets! but then what a lovely hand! That necklace too is splendid, but the neck it lies on is more beautiful still."

"Be quiet, you little flatterer," said the countess.

"Is that his lordship's portrait?" said Philine, pointing to a costly locket suspended by handsome chains at the Countess's left side.

"Yes, it was painted when we were engaged," replied the Countess.

"Was he so young?" said Philine. "I thought you had only been married a few years."

"His youthful looks must be set down to the artist's account," said the Countess.

"He is a handsome man," said Philine; "but," she went on, laying her hand on the countess's heart, "has no other likeness ever stolen into *this* hidden casket?"

"You are very bold, Philine," said the Countess. "I see I have spoiled you; let me never hear anything of the kind again."

"If you are angry, I am miserable," said Philine, and ran out of the room.

Wilhelm still held that lovely hand in his; his eyes were fixed on the clasp of her bracelet, where to his great astonishment he saw his own initials in brilliants. "Have I really," he said modestly, "your own hair in this beautiful ring?"

"Yes," she answered in a low, hardly audible voice; recovered herself however in a moment and added, pressing his hand as she spoke: "Rise, farewell."

"Here is my name," he exclaimed. "It is the strangest chance;" and he pointed to the diamond clasp.

"What?" said the Countess. "Those are the initials of one of my friends."

"But they are mine too," said Wilhelm. "Do not forget me. Nothing will ever be able to efface your likeness from my heart. Farewell! let me go, I dare not stay."

He kissed her hand and was going to rise, when, as sometimes in dreams the strangest things unfold into others yet stranger and more surprising, he suddenly, without knowing how it had happened, found the Countess in his arms; her lips were resting on his and their eager kisses gave them to taste of that perfect bliss which we can only sip from the passionate foam of love's freshly poured-out goblet.

Her head was resting on his shoulder; the rumpled curls and ribbons were not thought of. She had thrown her arm round him; he pressed her warmly again and again to his heart. Why cannot such moments last for ever? Woe be to the cruel, envious fate that cut short even this brief joy for our friends!

Suddenly the Countess laid her hand on her heart, and with a cry tore herself from him. Wilhelm was

terrified; he started up from his wonderful dream and stood like a stunned man before her.

One hand was still on her heart; she covered her eyes with the other and after a moment's pause exclaimed, "Leave me quickly."

But still he stood before her.

She took her hand from her eyes, gave him a look which cannot be described, and said in the gentlest, sweetest tone: "If you love me, leave me at once."

Wilhelm was out of the room and in his own before he knew where he was.

What strange warning sent by chance or fate could have torn these unhappy ones from each other?

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

LAERTES was standing meditatively at the window leaning on one arm and looking at the fields before him. Philine came stealing across the great saloon, leant against her friend and began to laugh at his grave looks.

"Don't laugh," he said; "it's really horrible to see how quickly time passes and every thing changes and comes to an end. Only look at this place. A little while ago there was a magnificent camp here. How jolly those tents looked! What a merry life went on inside them, how lively it all was! and how carefully the whole district was guarded! Now it has all vanished at once. The trampled straw and the holes they used for cooking will show where it was for a short time; then the fields will be ploughed over, and before long the presence of so many thousands of active fellows will only be dimly remembered by a few old people in the neighbourhood."

Philine began to sing, and drew her friend away from the window to have a dance with her in the middle of the great room. "You see," she said, "it's of no use trying to catch up old Time when he's really gone; we'd better pay him gay and graceful honours and treat him as a charming divinity while he's passing-by."

They had scarcely taken a few turns when Madame Melina came in, and Philine maliciously asked her to join in their dance merely that she might laugh at her awkwardness behind her back,

Then the Baron came in, bringing kind messages and presents from the Count and Countess who, he said, had left at an early hour in the morning; after delivering these he went on to Wilhelm who was busy with Mignon in the next room. The child had been very affectionate and obliging: she had been enquiring after Wilhelm's parents, brothers, sisters and other relations and so reminding him that it was his duty to send them some news of himself.

The Baron brought him a farewell greeting from the Count and Countess with a special assurance from the former of the great satisfaction which Wilhelm's acting, poetry, and the pains he had taken on behalf of their theatre had afforded him. In proof of this the Baron produced a purse, through the meshes of which Wilhelm could see the tempting colour and glitter of new gold. He stepped back and refused to accept it.

"You must not look at this gift," said the Baron, "as payment for the use of your talents; it is only meant as a recompense for your loss of time and a grateful recognition of the trouble you have taken. If our talents bring us fame and favour in the eyes of others, it is but fair that our own industry and exertion should provide us with the means of satisfying our own necessities; for, after all, we are not made of mind only. If we had been in a town, where everything was to be had, this small sum of money would have been transformed into a watch, ring, or something else; as it is, I turn the conjuror's wand over to you: buy the jewel that you like best and can make the most use of, and keep it in remembrance of us. But at the same time don't forget to hold the purse in high honour. The ladies knitted it themselves, hoping that in so doing they should render its contents more acceptable."

"I hope," said Wilhelm, "you will pardon the doubt and hesitation I feel at accepting this gift. It seems to render null and void the little I have done, and prevent me from looking back on this time freely and happily. Money is very useful for paying off and getting rid of anything; now I should not like to be paid off and forgotten in this house."

"That is not at all the case," answered the Baron; "but as you are so sensitive yourself you cannot expect that a man like the Count, whose especial ambition it is to be attentive and just, should be willing to remain in the belief that he is entirely your debtor. The trouble you took and the time you spent in promoting his wishes did not escape his notice; indeed he knows that in order to expedite certain arrangements you were not sparing even of your own money. How can I appear before him again under these circumstances, if I am not able to say that his gratitude has given you pleasure?"

"If I needed only to think of myself," replied Wilhelm, "and might venture to follow my own impulses, I should still, notwithstanding all your arguments, be obstinate enough to refuse this gift, pleasing and honourable as it is. But I am obliged to confess that though its acceptance places me in one difficulty it relieves me from another—a difficulty with regard to my own family which, though I have not mentioned it, has been a great source of trouble to me. The truth is, I have not been so economical as I ought either with the money or time for which I have to give account; and now, through his lordship's generosity I shall be able to give a very cheerful report to my friends of the good fortune to which this remarkable by-path has led me. In so doing I am sacrificing to a higher duty that delicacy of feeling which in matters of this kind warns us like a tender conscience:

in order to appear boldly before my father I must submit to stand ashamed in your presence."

"It is remarkable," said the Baron, "what strange scruples people make at accepting money from friends and patrons, when they would be thankful and happy to receive any other present from the same hand. Human nature too, has a good many more such odd fancies, about which it is fond of making and careful in maintaining scruples."

"Is not that the case with all so-called points of honour," said Wilhelm.

"Yes," replied the Baron, "and there are many other similar prejudices. We are afraid of rooting them out lest we pluck up noble plants with them; but I am always rejoiced to meet with individual men who can distinguish above what prejudices they can and ought to rise. There is a story told of a very clever poet which always gives me great pleasure. He had written some pieces for the court theatre with which the Emperor was extremely pleased. 'I must give him some really substantial reward,' said the generous prince; 'try and find out whether there is any jewel or other valuable which he would like to have, or if he would be too proud to accept money.' The poet in his own jocular way made the following answer to the courtier sent to ask him: 'I am extremely grateful for these gracious intentions; and as the Emperor takes money every day from us, I do not see why I should be ashamed of receiving money from him.'"

The Baron had scarcely left the room before Wilhelm began eagerly counting over the cash he had so unexpectedly, and in his own opinion so undeservedly, received. As he poured the bright, glittering coins one after another out of the pretty, delicate purse, it seemed as if some presentiment of that worth and dignity attaching

to gold, which as a general rule men do not feel until later on in life, glanced for the first time across his mind. On reckoning, he found that, especially as Melina had promised to pay the sum formerly advanced him at once, he should now have as much, or even more, in hand as on the day when Philine first asked him to give her his nosegay. He thought of his talent with secret gratification, with a little pride of the good fortune which had guided and accompanied him thus far, and then took up his pen to write a letter which should relieve his family from every perplexity and at the same time set his own conduct in the most favourable light. He avoided giving a regular history of events and only hinted mysteriously and significantly at what had occurred to him. The flourishing state of his funds, the profitable way in which he had used his talents, favour experienced from the great and kindness shown him by women, a wide circle of acquaintance, cultivation of his bodily and mental powers and bright prospects for the future formed altogether as marvellous a picture in the air as Fata Morgana herself could have woven together.

This exalted frame of mind continued after the letter was finished, and he held a long conversation with himself in which its contents were recapitulated and an active, praiseworthy future sketched out. The example of so many high-minded soldiers had kindled his enthusiasm, Shakespeare's plays had opened up a new world, and the beautiful countess's kiss was still burning within him in a way no words could describe. All this could not, and was not meant to remain without effect on his life.

The *Stallmeister* came to ask whether they had finished packing. Alas, no one but Melina had thought even of beginning. They were to start at once. The Count had

promised to send them a few days' journey on their way, the horses were ready and could not be spared long. Wilhelm asked for his trunk. Madame Melina had used it for her own things. He demanded his money. Melina had packed it up carefully at the very bottom of his own box. Philine said, "There is room in mine," took his clothes, told Mignon to bring the rest of his things, and Wilhelm was forced to consent against his will.

While the luggage was being put up and the final preparations for the journey made, Melina said: "It annoys me that our company should look so like a set of strolling rope-dancers and mountebanks. I wish Mignon would put on girls' clothes and the harper have that enormous beard shaved before we start." Mignon clung to Wilhelm, crying, "I am a boy, I will not be a girl." The old man said nothing, and Philine made some droll remarks on a peculiar notion of her patron the Count, suggested by this matter. "If the harper does cut off his beard," she said, "he'd better sew it carefully on to a piece of ribbon, so as to be able to tie it on again directly, if he should chance to come across the Count anywhere. It was that beard that secured him his lordship's favour."

On their pressing her to explain this strange remark, she said: "It is the Count's opinion that illusion in a play is very much assisted when an actor maintains his character and continues to play his part in everyday life. For that reason he took such a fancy to the Pedant, and thought it very wise of the harper to wear his false beard by day as well as on the stage; he said it looked so very natural that he was quite delighted with it."

While the rest were laughing at this mistake of the Count's and at his strange opinions, the harper drew Wilhelm on one side, took leave of him, and begged with tears that he might be dismissed. Wilhelm persuaded and

comforted him by assurances that he would take his side against any of the others; and that no one should touch, much less cut off, a single hair of his head against his will.

The old man was very much affected; a strange light glowed in his eyes. "It is not that which drives me away," he said. "For a long time I have been reproaching myself in secret for staying with you. I ought to remain nowhere, for misfortune overtakes me and injures those who are found in my company. If you do not let me go, you have everything to dread, but do not ask my secret; I am not my own, I cannot stay."

"Whose are you then? Who can have such complete power over you?"

"Sir, leave my fearful secret to me, I entreat you, and let me depart. It is no earthly judge who pursues me with his vengeance. I belong to an inexorable Destiny, and I dare not stay."

"I certainly shall not let you go in your present condition."

"It would be the greatest treason to you, my benefactor, if I were even to linger. I should be safe, but you would be in danger. You do not know who it is that you are cherishing so near you. I am guilty, but more unfortunate than guilty. My presence scares prosperity away, and even a good deed becomes powerless if I approach. I ought always to lead a roaming and unsettled life that my evil genius may not overtake me. He follows slowly and does not discover himself till I lie down to rest. The best way of proving my gratitude is to leave you."

"You are a strange being," said Wilhelm; "but you can no more shake my confidence in you than rob me of the hope seeing you one day happy. I do not wish

to penetrate the secret of your superstitious belief, but if you are living in the constant fear of marvellous combinations and omens, I will say for your comfort and encouragement: Make my good fortune your companion, and we'll see which proves the stronger, your dark genius, or my bright one."

Wilhelm seized this opportunity to comfort him in many ways; having already for some time noticed or fancied that his strange companion was a man who either by chance or the divine will had drawn down a load of guilt on himself, the remembrance of which was a burden that never left him. A few days before, Wilhelm had heard him singing, and taken especial notice of the following lines:

"For him the bright, clear light of dawn
Paints the horizon red and flaming;
And the sweet vision of our world at morn,
Breaks o'er his guilty head, revenge proclaiming."

But he might say what he liked, Wilhelm had an answer for every objection, looked at every thing on its brightest side, and spoke so well, so affectionately and in such a kind comforting way, that the old man really seemed to revive and give up his gloomy fancies.

CHAPTER II.

MELINA hoped to establish himself in some small thriving town with his company. They had reached the last place to which the Count's horses were to convey them and were looking about for means of further transport. Melina had undertaken to provide this and was, as usual, very mean in his arrangements. Wilhelm, on the other hand, with the Countess's shining ducats in his

pocket, thought he had a perfect right to spend in a jovial style, forgetting how vain-gloriously he had made them figure in the grand balance reported to his father.

His friend Shakespeare, whom he also called his godfather and for whose sake he delighted in his name of Wilhelm, had made him acquainted with a certain prince who passed a period of his life in inferior, even bad, company, and in spite of his own noble nature had taken delight in the roughness, indecency, and folly of a set of really low fellows. This ideal was most welcome to Wilhelm, as it suggested a comparison with his own present circumstances and wonderfully facilitated the self-deception towards which he felt—and knew he felt—an almost unconquerable tendency in himself.

He began to think about his dress. On this point he came to the conclusion that a vest, over which in case of need he could throw a short cloak, was a very fitting costume for a traveller, and strong knitted trousers with laced boots the right thing for a pedestrian. He then supplied himself with a beautiful silk sash, which he wore at first under the pretext of keeping himself warm; at the same time he delivered his neck from the bondage of a cravat, and had some strips of muslin sown on to his shirt-collar; these, turning out broader than was expected, looked just like an old-fashioned ruff. The pretty silk handkerchief which he had saved from the fire as a remembrance of Mariana, lay tied in a loose knot under the muslin frill; and a round hat with a gay ribbon and a tall feather completed this masquerade costume.

The women declared it was most becoming. Philine pretended to be perfectly enchanted, and begged him to give her the beautiful hair which, in order to approach

the natural appearance of his chosen ideal more nearly, he had ruthlessly cut off. This was not a bad plan for commending herself to his favour, and as our friend by his generosity had acquired a right to play Prince Harry towards the others, he soon gained a taste for planning and helping to carry out some mad pranks himself. They fenced, danced, invented all kinds of games, and in the joy of their hearts made very good use of some tolerable wine they met with; meanwhile Philine is lying in wait for our prudish hero, and woe be to him if his good genius is not on the look-out too!

One amusement diverted them exceedingly: it consisted of an extemporised play, in which they mimicked and made fun of their late patrons and benefactors. Some of the actors had a very good memory for the peculiarities of certain members of the aristocratic party at the castle; their imitation of these was received with immense applause, and when Philine, from the archives of her own experience, produced some remarkable declarations of love which had been made to her, they could hardly contain themselves for joy and mischievous fun.

Wilhelm said they were most ungrateful, and got for answer: they had worked hard enough for all they had received, and in fact, considering all things, had not been treated as they deserved. Then began a series of complaints about the little respect and notice that had been shown them and the slights they had received. The flood of derision, banter, and mimicry set in again, growing more bitter and unjust as it rolled on.

"I wish," said Wilhelm, after listening for a short time, "that it were not so easy to see the envy and self-love that lies behind all you are saying. I wish you could look at these people and their position from

the right point of view. It is no common matter to be placed by your very birth in a high social position. The man who inherits possessions which give him at once a perfectly easy existence, who from his very childhood is surrounded by every necessary and extra, (if I may use the word,) of life, gets a habit of looking at these things as the best and highest; the worth of a fellow-man who has been richly gifted by nature is not so clear to him. The behaviour of the upper classes to their inferiors and also to each other is measured by the external advantages of fortune. They recognise the worth of a man's title, rank, dress and carriages, but not his own intrinsic merit."

These words produced immoderate applause. It was pronounced shameful that real merit should always be overlooked, and that there should be no trace of natural or cordial intercourse in the great world, on which last point in particular they had a great deal to say.

"Don't blame them for that," said Wilhelm; "you ought rather to pity them; for how seldom they have any exalted feeling of that one blessing which we recognise as the highest, and which nature gives us from the stores of her own intrinsic wealth! Friendship—real friendship—is for us poor people, who have little or perhaps nothing at all beside. We have no gracious favours, no patronage, no presents for those we love. We can give them nothing but ourselves. But this whole self we must give, and make sure to them for ever if the gift is to be of any worth. What an enjoyment, what a happiness both for the giver and receiver! How perfectly happy faithful love can make us! It gives to this passing life of ours a feeling of heavenly certainty; it is the capital from which all our other wealth is drawn."

While he was speaking in this way, Mignon had

come closer to him; she threw her arms round his neck and laid her little head on his shoulder. He placed his hand on it and continued: "How easy it is for a great man to gain people's affections and win their hearts! A kind, good-natured, in any degree humane course of conduct does wonders; and then what means such a man has at command for securing the minds he has once gained! Things are so much scarcer and more difficult of attainment for us that naturally we set a higher value on what we earn and effect. What touching instances we have of servants sacrificing themselves for their masters! They are wonderfully described in Shakespeare. In such cases fidelity is the endeavour of a noble soul to place itself on a level with the great. By unflinching attachment and love a servant whose master would otherwise be justified in regarding him as a paid slave, makes himself his lord's equal. Yes, these virtues are only for the lower class; it cannot do without them, and they become it well. The man who has money enough to rid himself of every obligation will soon feel himself above the necessity of gratitude: and I really think that in this sense I may venture to say, though a great man may have friends, he cannot be a friend himself."

Mignon pressed closer and closer to him.

"That is all very well," said one of the party; "we don't want their friendship and have never asked for it. But if they undertake to be patrons of art they ought to understand it better. When we were acting best they did not listen; there was nothing but partiality. Those who happened to be in favour were applauded, and those who really deserved applause were not favourites. The way in which folly, dulness and insipidity used to be noticed and commended was not to be tolerated."

"Well," said Wilhelm, "I think you will find, that

making allowance for what may have been caused by malice or irony love and the arts share the same lot. If an artist wishes to produce anything perfect he must live in single-minded devotion to that one thing; and if the public are to take as much interest in it as the artist hopes they may they too must, at all events in some measure, share this single-eyed devotion. Now, is this possible for a man of the world in the midst of a life so full of distracting cares and pleasures?

"Believe me, my friends, with talents it is just the same as with virtues; if we don't love them for their own sake we had better give them up entirely; but they neither of them ever meet with their due recognition or reward unless, like some dangerous secret, they are practised in obscurity."

"And while we are waiting for some *connoisseur* to find us out we may starve," said a voice out of the corner.

"Not yet awhile," said Wilhelm. "I have always noticed that so long as a man lives and moves he can find food of some sort, if not the most abundant. What have you really to complain of now? Were not we unexpectedly housed and fed just when our prospects were at their worst? And now, when we are really in want of nothing, does it ever occur to one of us to do anything towards our own improvement or make the slightest effort at anything better than we have yet been capable of? (We are just like school-children, glad to do anything but what will remind us of our lessons.)"

"Yes," said Philine, "it is really inexcusable. Come now, let us choose a play at once and act it on the spot. Each of us must do his best, just as if we were acting to the largest audience."

The piece was soon decided on. It was one of

those which used to be very popular in Germany but are never heard of now. Some of the party whistled a symphony; every one tried to recollect his part quickly; they began and went through the whole piece most attentively, and the result was beyond their expectations. They applauded each other and felt they had seldom done so well.

When it was over they all felt unusually pleased, partly at their well-spent time and partly because each had reason to be satisfied with his own share in the performance.

Wilhelm was profuse in his praises and their conversation was cheerful and gay.

"You would see," exclaimed our friend, "what progress we should make if we continued this kind of practise, instead of limiting ourselves to learning by heart, rehearsing and acting in a mechanical fashion and merely because it is our duty. Musicians deserve far more praise than we do and enjoy their work a great deal more. See how exact they are when they are practising together, what trouble they take to tune their instruments, how strictly they keep time, and how delicate is their sense of the relative loudness and softness needed in the tones! It never occurs to one of them to gratify his own vanity by accompanying another's solo too loudly. Each member of the orchestra tries to play in the mind and spirit of the composer and express his own appointed portion perfectly, whether it be trifling or important. Now our art may be looked upon as even more refined than any kind of music; it is our vocation to represent the most commonplace as well as the rarest utterances of mankind with taste and so as to render them a source of delight, and ought we to go to work in a less exact and intelligent way than the musi-

cian? What can be more abominable than to slur over your part at rehearsal and trust to good luck and the mood you may chance to be in at the representation? We ought to place our greatest delight in agreeing with one another, and think it our greatest good fortune to obtain each other's approbation; indeed the applause of the public ought to have no value in our eyes unless it has been in a manner guaranteed by our own beforehand. Why can the director of an orchestra feel so much more certainty than the manager of a theatre? Because every false note that offends the ear brings down shame on the man that produced it; but how seldom do you hear an actor acknowledge, or see him ashamed of blunders, whether pardonable or unpardonable, which offend the inward ear continually and outrageously? I only wish the stage were no broader than a rope-dancer's wire; then all stupid awkward fellows would be afraid to venture on it, whereas now every one thinks he has talent enough to figure there."

The party took this apostrophe in good part, each being inwardly convinced that, as he had just done his part so well in concert with the rest, it could not apply to him, and they agreed that the system which they had now begun, of practising their parts together should be pursued on this journey and at any future time when they met. It was thought however that, as this was a matter dependent entirely on their own good temper and free will, no real manager ought to meddle in it. It was accepted as a settled thing that among good people the republican was the best form of government, and maintained that the office of manager ought to pass from one to another of the party, who must be elected by the others, and with whom a kind of little senate was to be associated. Their idea pleased them so

perfectly that they wanted to put it into execution at once.

"I have no objection," said Melina, "to your making the experiment during our journey, and will with pleasure resign my office until we have reached our destination."

He secretly hoped that this plan would enable him to save, by throwing many an expense on the little republic or the manager for the time being.

They now began an eager consultation as to the best form into which their new state should be reduced.

"It is a migratory realm," said Laertes, "so we shall have no disputes as to boundaries."

They went at once to work and chose Wilhelm as their first manager. The senate was appointed, the women being allowed seats and votes; laws were proposed, rejected, or approved. Time passed unnoticed in this pleasant way, and because it had been agreeably spent they fancied they had been doing something very useful, and by the preparation of their own new method revealing new prospects for the national stage.

CHAPTER III.

SEEING the company in such a promising mood, Wilhelm hoped to be able to discuss with them the poetical merits of different plays. "It is not enough," he said when they met the next day, "for an actor just to glance over a piece superficially, form his judgment and pronounce his verdict on a first impression without due examination. That is all very well for the spectators who want to be touched and amused but have no wish to

criticise or pass judgment. The actor ought to be able to give a reason for his praise or blame; but how is he to do that when he does not know how to penetrate into the spirit and intention of the author? I have had such a good opportunity during the last few days of noticing in myself the error of judging any single passage out of a part, or any part by itself without reference to the rest of the play, that I should like to give you the story as an example, if you will be kind enough to listen to me.

“You remember Shakespeare’s incomparable Hamlet, which gave you so much pleasure when we read it aloud at the castle. We proposed to act the play, and I in my ignorance undertook the part of Hamlet. With the intention of studying it I began learning by heart the most powerful passages, such as the soliloquies, and those scenes where mental strength, animation and a noble and elevated tone of mind have full play, and where an excited state of feeling can manifest itself in expressions that reach the heart.

“I thought too that I was entering into the spirit of the part by taking as it were upon myself Hamlet’s deep load of melancholy, and beneath this burden trying to follow my model through the strange labyrinth of his caprices and peculiarities, and in this way I learnt and practised, believing that by degrees I should become one and the same with my hero.

“But the further I went the more difficult I found it to represent the whole; and at last it seemed almost an impossibility to arrive at any complete idea of the part.

“Then I went through the piece in order from beginning to end, but here too there was much that would not fit in. At times the characters, at times the expression seemed contradictory, and I almost despaired of

finding any one key in which I could represent my entire part with all its shades and variations. In the winding paths of this maze I laboured vainly for a long time, and at last hit upon quite a new way by which I hoped to reach my end.

“I began to hunt up every trace that would indicate what Hamlet's character must have been before his father's death: what, independently of that sad event and the fearful occurrence which followed, he was and might have become.

“Of noble and gentle descent, this royal flower grew up under the immediate influence of majesty. The ideas of law, justice and princely dignity, with a feeling for the good and correct, developed in his mind at the same time with the consciousness of his own high birth. He was a prince and had been born one; he wished to rule in order that good men and goodness might run their course unhindered. Pleasing in his appearance, naturally well-bred and sincerely courteous, he was to become a model for youth and a joy to the world.

“His love for Ophelia was no obtrusive passion; it was a quiet presentiment of the sweet longing for love that would come later; his eager practice of chivalry was not entirely original, and needed the excitement of emulation. He recognised honest men instinctively by the single-eyed purity of his own heart, and knew how to value the repose which a sincere mind finds in the open heart of his friend. He had learnt, up to a certain point, to appreciate the good and beautiful in art and science; folly and insipidity were repulsive to him, and if ever hatred could spring up in such a tender soul, it was only in just sufficient measure to produce contempt for false and fickle courtiers and allow him to make a jest of them in scorn. His manner was calm and col-

lected, his behaviour simple and unaffected; he was neither happy in idleness nor too eager after occupation, and the student's lounging saunter seemed still to cling to him at court. His gaiety sprang rather from the temper of the moment than from his heart; he was a good companion, yielding, modest in his demands and thoughtful; he could forgive and forget an offence, but never be intimate with any who had overstepped the bounds of what was just, right, and correct.

"When we read the play together you will be able to judge if I am on the right track. At all events I hope to be able to maintain all my opinions by passages."

This description was loudly applauded: they fancied they saw already how easily Hamlet's actions might now be explained, rejoiced at this new method of penetrating into the meaning of an author and resolved, each and all, to study some piece on the same principle and so unravel its writer's meaning.

CHAPTER IV.

THE company were only to stay a few days in the place, but during this time many of its members met with some not unpleasant adventures. Laertes, for one, received the most pressing attentions from a lady possessing some property in the neighbourhood; he returned her politeness with the utmost coldness and even discourtesy, and had to bear plenty of banter from Philine for his conduct. She seized this opportunity to tell Wilhelm the unfortunate love-story which lay at the root of this poor fellow's hatred to women. "Who could be angry with him," she exclaimed, "for hating a sex which

played him such a shameful trick, and obliged him to swallow every possible evil that men can have to fear from women in one most strongly concentrated draught? Fancy; in four and twenty hours he was lover, bridegroom, husband, discarded, a patient and a widower! I don't really know how matters could very well have been worse."

Laertes ran out of the room half-laughing, half-vexed; and Philine began, in her own charming way, to tell how when he was only eighteen he had joined a company of players, and on arriving had seen among them a beautiful girl of fourteen whose father, having fallen out with the manager, was on the point of leaving the company: how Laertes had fallen desperately in love on the spot, had used every possible persuasion to induce the father to remain, and had at last promised to marry the girl: how after a very pleasant engagement of a few hours he had become a happy husband, but the next morning—having in his overflowing tenderness hastened home much too soon after the rehearsal—he had found an elder lover in his place, had hit about him at random in frantic rage, challenged both father and lover, and come off himself with a very tolerable wound: how then father and daughter had departed in the night leaving him behind—wounded alas, in more senses than one—and his bad luck had placed him in the hands of such a miserable surgeon that he finally came out of the affair with blackened teeth and bleared eyes, and she thought was very much to be pitied, being in other respects the best fellow possible. She finished by saying: "I pity the poor fool, especially for his hatred to women; (why what can life be worth to a woman-hater?)"

Melina here interrupted her with the news that all was ready for their journey and they should be able to

start the next morning, handing them at the same time a plan of his arrangements for their accommodation. "If some kind friend will take me on his lap," said Philine, "I will be content to be crowded up in this miserable fashion, and after all it is really of no consequence."

"It does not matter," said Laertes too, coming in at the moment.

"It's most annoying," said Wilhelm, and hurried out of the room. He found a very comfortable carriage of which Melina had not told them, and hired it at his own expense. A fresh arrangement for the journey was made, and they were rejoicing at the prospect of comfort which lay before them, when a most serious piece of news arrived: that a body of freebooters from whom but little good might be augured had been seen on the road they were about to travel.

Though this intelligence was very ambiguous and uncertain, the people of the place paid great attention to it, as judging from the position of the two armies, it seemed impossible either that any of the enemy's troops should have been able to steal through unperceived or that a part of the friendly army could have remained so far behind. Every one was eager to describe the expected danger in the most alarming terms and advise the travellers to put off their journey.

Most of the party were soon frightened; and the members of the commonwealth having been called together to debate on this important matter in accordance with their new republican form of government, opinion was almost unanimous, either that the danger should be avoided by remaining in the town, or evaded by taking a different road.

Wilhelm alone had no fear, and considered it dis-

graceful to give up a plan which had been resolved on after so much reflection, merely on account of a vague rumour. He tried to encourage them, and his reasons were manly and convincing.

"After all it is only a report," he said, "and how many such rumours are circulated in time of war! Sensible people say the thing is most unlikely, indeed almost impossible, and are we to be decided on a matter so important as this by a mere report? The route planned for us by the Count, and for which our passport has been made out, is the shortest and best. It leads to a town where you have friends and acquaintance and hope to be well received. The other way would take us there too, but by bad roads and most circuitously. Is there any hope that at this late season we shall get to our destination at all that way? And if we do, think of the money and time wasted on the road!"

He said a great deal more and put the matter in so many favourable points of view that their fears diminished and their courage revived. He had so much to say too about the discipline of the regular troops, described the marauders and their rabble as so perfectly contemptible, and represented even danger itself in such a pleasant jovial way that they all cheered up as they listened to him.

Laertes took his side from the first and protested that he would neither flinch nor yield. The old blusterer found a few assenting expressions to utter in his own peculiar fashion. Philine laughed at them all, and as Madame Melina's stout heart had not given way under her physical condition and she thought the proposition heroic, Melina had no choice but to yield, especially as he hoped to save a good deal by taking the nearest route. So the proposal was heartily agreed to,

They next began to prepare for defence in case of necessity. Large cutlasses were bought and suspended by embroidered straps over their shoulders, Wilhelm in addition sticking a pair of pocket pistols into his girdle. Laertes too was provided with a good gun, and they started in high spirits.

On the second day their drivers, who were well acquainted with the neighbourhood, proposed to rest at noon on the wooded side of a hill, as the village was some distance off and this was a pleasant road in fine weather.

It was a lovely day and they all agreed gladly. Wilhelm walked over the hills before the rest, every one whom he met wondering at his extraordinary appearance. He went briskly and happily up through the wood, Laertes came whistling behind, and only the women were dragged up in the carriages. Mignon too ran along by Wilhelm's side, proud of a cutlass which they had not been able to refuse her when the rest were being armed. She had twisted a string of beads round her hat, one of the relics of Mariana preserved by Wilhelm. The fair-haired Friedrich carried Laertes' gun, and the old harper presented a most peaceful appearance. His long garment was tucked into his girdle that he might walk more freely; he leaned upon a knotted staff; his harp had been left behind in the carriage.

When they had reached the top of the hill, which was not accomplished without some difficulty, they recognised their destined resting-place at once by the tall beech-trees which surrounded and sheltered it. A broad, gently-sloping meadow invited them to rest there; an enclosed spring offered delicious refreshment, and from the other side, across dales and wooded hills, a view was to be seen so lovely as to inspire them with hope.

Villages and mills nestled in the valleys, little towns dotted the plain, and quite in the distance were more mountains which, showing only as a dim boundary, added to the hopefulness of the prospect.

Those who reached the place first took possession of it, rested themselves under the shady trees, made a fire and waited busily for the others, singing the while; the rest came up one by one, and all united in joyfully greeting such a lovely place, such beautiful weather, and such an inexpressibly charming landscape.

CHAPTER V.

THEY had enjoyed many a pleasant hour within four walls together, but here, where the free and open sky and the lovely country seemed to clear and purify their minds, the enjoyment was naturally more vivid and keener. They felt drawn nearer to each other and longed to spend their whole lives in such a pleasant place. They envied the hunters, charcoal burners, and wood-cutters for callings which fixed them in such delightful abodes, and their fancy was especially taken by the domestic economy of a gang of gipsies. They envied these strange fellows their apparent right to enjoy all the romantic charms of nature in the most blissful idleness, and rejoiced that their own existence at that moment was not totally unlike this much to be desired way of life.

Meanwhile the women had begun boiling the potatoes, unpacking and preparing the provisions they had brought with them. Some pots were already standing near the fire, the party had established themselves in little knots under the trees and bushes; their strange

way of dressing and the different kinds of weapons with which they were armed gave them a foreign look; the horses were being fed at a little distance, and, if the carriages had been hidden, the illusion would have been perfect; the little band looked thoroughly romantic.

To Wilhelm the pleasure was of a kind he had never enjoyed before. He could imagine himself the leader of a wandering colony, talked with every one of the party in this feeling, and carried out the fancy of the moment as poetically as possible. Their spirits rose, they ate, drank and were merry; repeating over and over again that they had never spent happier moments.

This state of things had not continued long before the younger men began to feel a desire for activity awaking within them. Wilhelm and Laertes took up the foils and began to practise, this time with a view to performing on the stage. They wished to represent the duel where Hamlet and his adversary come to such a tragic end. Both the friends were convinced that the usual stage practice of making a few awkward passes at one another was not allowable; they hoped to present an example of the way in which that scene might be acted so as to please even a *connoisseur* in the art of fencing. A circle was formed round them; they fenced eagerly and yet carefully, and the interest of the spectators increased with every round.

Suddenly a shot was fired in the bushes close to them; then another, and the party dispersed in terror. They soon saw armed men pressing forward towards the place where the horses were being fed, not far from the carriages loaded with luggage.

A general shriek rose from the women; our heroes threw away the foils, seized their pistols and rushed to

meet the brigands, demanding with most emphatic threats what they meant by such a proceeding.

Their only and very laconic answer consisting in a few musket-shots, Wilhelm at once took aim at a shock-headed fellow who was climbing on to the top of one of the coaches and cutting the cords that tied the luggage. His aim was good, and the man came tumbling down; Laertes had not missed either, and the friends were boldly drawing their side-arms, when a number of the robbers rushed upon them cursing and bellowing, fired two or three times and then with flashing sabres began to resist their bold attack. Our young heroes stood their ground bravely and called on the others, encouraging them to make a general defence. But before long Wilhelm lost sight and consciousness. He fell, stunned by a shot between the breast and the left arm and a stroke from a sword that cut through his hat and nearly penetrated the brain; he only learnt the unfortunate end of the fray from the accounts of the rest.

On opening his eyes he found himself in the strangest position. The first thing he saw through the mist still hovering before his eyes was Philine's face bending over his own. He felt weak, and on trying to rise found he was resting on her lap, on which he had no choice but to sink back again. She was sitting on the grass, he lay stretched out before her; as far as she could she had prepared him a soft couch in her arms and held his head gently pressed against herself. Mignon was kneeling at his feet and embracing them, her hair hanging loose and stained with blood.

When he was able to notice the blood on his own clothes, he asked in a broken voice where he was and what had happened. Philine begged him to be quiet;

the rest, she said, were all safe and no one wounded but himself and Laertes. She would tell him nothing more, but urgently begged him to be quiet, as his wounds had been hurriedly and badly dressed. He put out his hand to Mignon and asked the reason of the blood on her hair, believing she was wounded too.

To calm him Philine answered that when the good, affectionate child had seen her friend wounded she had wanted to stanch the blood and could think of nothing to do it with but her own long loose hair; she had soon been obliged to give up the attempt as quite useless: then they had bound up the wounds with moss and fungus and Philine had given up her neck-handkerchief for the purpose.

Wilhelm noticed that she was sitting with her back against her own trunk and that it seemed locked and uninjured. He asked whether the others had been so fortunate as to save their possessions. She shrugged her shoulders, with a glance at the meadow; it was strewn with broken boxes, shattered trunks and portmanteaus cut to pieces, besides numbers of smaller goods and chattels. Not a soul was to be seen; their own strange little group was alone in this solitude.

Wilhelm soon heard more than he liked. The rest of the men, they told him, who might at any rate have made some resistance, had been soon terrified and overcome, some had run away, and the rest had stood looking on at their misfortunes in helpless horror. The drivers, who in hope of saving their horses had made the most determined resistance of any, were soon thrown down and bound, and in a short time all the luggage had been ransacked and carried off. As soon as they were relieved from the fear of death the terrified travellers had begun

to groan over their losses and had gone off in all haste to the neighbouring village, taking Laertes, whose wound was but slight, and the few wrecks of their former possessions with them. The harper had placed his injured harp against a tree and had gone off with the rest to try and find a surgeon, meaning to return with the greatest speed possible lest he should see his benefactor no more alive.

CHAPTER VI.

OUR three unfortunate adventurers remained some time longer in their strange position; no one came to their aid. Evening drew on; night was falling fast. Philine's indifference changed into restlessness, and Mignon ran backwards and forwards growing more impatient every moment. At length their wish for some human presence was granted, but accompanied by sounds that terrified them afresh. They could distinctly hear a troop of horses coming along the road they had travelled themselves, and were afraid this must be a token that uninvited guests were near, hoping to glean a few leavings at this chosen spot.

It was a pleasant surprise instead to see a lady mounted on a grey horse ride out of the thicket, accompanied by an elderly gentleman and a number of mounted cavaliers, and followed by grooms, servants, and a troop of hussars.

Philine opened her eyes at this apparition and was just going to call on the beautiful Amazon for help, when the latter noticed the little group, seemed very much surprised at the sight, turned her horse, and rode up to them. She made eager enquiries after the wounded

man, whose position in the lap of this frivolous Samaritan seemed to strike her as most strange.

"Is he your husband?" she said.

"No, only a good friend," answered Philine in a tone which was exceedingly repugnant to Wilhelm. His eyes were fixed on the gentle, noble, calm and sympathising features of the lady; he thought he had never seen anything more noble or lovely. Her figure was hidden by a loose great-coat, which she seemed to have borrowed from one of her companions as a protection against the evening air.

Meanwhile the rest of the party had come up; some of them dismounted, the lady did the same and with the kindest interest asked for details of their misfortune and particularly what were the wounds of the youth who lay stretched on the ground before her. After hearing the answer to her questions she turned away quickly and went with the old gentleman to the side of the meadow where the carriages were just halting after their slow ascent to this chosen spot.

She stood some time talking at the door of one of the coaches; a short stout man then got out and followed her to our wounded hero. It was easy to see that he was a surgeon by the little box he held in his hand and his leather bag of instruments. His manner might rather be called rough than prepossessing, but his touch was light and his help welcome.

After a careful examination he pronounced that none of the wounds were dangerous: he would dress them on the spot and the sick man could then be taken to the nearest village.

The young lady's anxiety seemed to increase. After walking backwards and forwards two or three times she brought the old gentleman again to the spot where

Wilhelm was lying, and said: "Look how shamefully they have treated him! and is not he suffering on our account?" Wilhelm heard but did not understand. She walked restlessly up and down. It seemed as if she could not tear herself from the sight of the wounded man, and yet as if she feared to offend against propriety by staying when they began to remove his upper clothing. This was not done without difficulty, and the surgeon was just ripping open his left coat-sleeve when the old gentleman came up and gravely represented to her the necessity of continuing their journey. Wilhelm had raised his eyes to look at her and was so fascinated by the expression of her face that he scarcely felt what was being done to him.

Meanwhile Philine had risen in order to kiss the lady's hand, and as they stood together Wilhelm thought he had never seen so strong a contrast. Philine had never before appeared in such an unfavourable light. It seemed to him she ought not even to approach, much less to touch, this exalted being.

The lady asked Philine several questions in a low voice, and then turning to the old gentleman who continued to stand by unmoved and saying: "Dear uncle, may I be generous at your expense?" she took off the great-coat, evidently with the intention of giving it to the stripped and wounded man.

The coat fell from her shoulders, and Wilhelm, who hitherto had been riveted by the healing expression that lay in her face, saw that she had a beautiful figure too. She came nearer and threw the coat gently over him. He longed to stammer a few words of thanks; but in that moment the vivid impression made by her presence worked so strangely on his senses that her head seemed suddenly surrounded by a glory, and a bright, shining

light spread by degrees over her entire form. The surgeon at that instant was preparing to extract the ball and touched him more roughly than before, the saint and her glory faded away, he sank back fainting, lost all consciousness and on coming to himself found that horsemen, carriages, the beautiful woman and her attendants had all vanished.

CHAPTER VII.

As soon as our friend's wounds were properly bound up and he was dressed, the surgeon hastened off, and at the same moment the old harper came up with a number of peasants. They soon made a litter by cutting down branches from the trees and weaving brushwood and twigs between them, placed the wounded man upon it, and guided by a mounted huntsman, whom the gentry had left for this purpose, went gently down the hill. The old harper, carrying his injured instrument, walked silently along lost in thought; Philine's trunk was carried by some of the peasants, she herself sauntering after with a bundle; Mignon ran on through the trees and thickets, sometimes in front sometimes by their side, looking ever and anon most longingly at her wounded benefactor, who lay quietly on the litter, wrapped up in his warm great-coat. An electric warmth seemed to stream into his body from the fine wool of which it was made; at all events he was thrown into a most delightful state of feeling. The beautiful possessor of that coat had produced a deep impression on him; he could still see it falling from her shoulders, and the noble graceful figure was still before him with the glory hovering round her; his

soul followed the footsteps of that vanished one through the woods and rocks.

Night had fallen before the little procession reached the village inn where the rest had already taken up their quarters, and were bemoaning their irreparable losses in the deepest despair. The only little dwelling-room of the house was crammed with people. Some were lying on straw, others on the benches, and a few had squeezed themselves in behind the stove. Frau Melina, in a little bed-chamber close by, was expecting the birth of her child in great anxiety. It had been hastened by the terror she had undergone, and as her only assistant was the young and inexperienced landlady, there was just ground for alarm.

When the new-comers demanded admittance there was a universal murmur of dissent. They all protested that the dangerous route had only been taken by Wilhelm's advice and under his guidance, threw the entire blame of the unfortunate result on his shoulders, and declared he must find a lodging elsewhere, at the same time barring the door against his entrance. They treated Philine more outrageously still, and Mignon and the harper had to endure their full share of abuse.

Their escort however had received special injunctions from his master and mistress to take great care of this forsaken little party, and was not to be trifled with. His patience was soon exhausted, and pushing them back, with oaths and threats he ordered them to make room for the new-comers. They soon began to obey. He pushed a table into the corner and made a bed for Wilhelm on it. Philine had her trunk deposited close by and took her seat upon that. Every one squeezed up as close as he could, and the man then went away to try and find a better lodging for the married couple.

He was hardly gone before their anger burst out again; reproaches followed thick and fast. Every one told and exaggerated his own losses, blaming the presumption, as they called it, which had cost them all so dear. They did not even conceal a certain malicious pleasure at Wilhelm's sufferings, and sneered at Philine, trying to prove that the way in which she had managed to save her trunk was highly criminal. Their taunts and innuendos would have led to the belief that while the rest of the brigands were busy plundering she had been trying (who could say by what arts and courtesies!) to gain favour with their leader, and so had induced him to leave her box uninjured. The only answer she made was to rattle the great padlocks of the said box in order to convince the envious creatures that it was really there and safe, and make them still more wretched by the sight of her own good luck.

CHAPTER VIII.

THOUGH Wilhelm was weak from loss of blood, and the vision of the helping and merciful angel had made him gentle and mild, he could not at last restrain his annoyance at the harsh unjust expressions uttered by these discontented people any longer, especially as his very silence seemed to excite them afresh. After a time he felt strong enough to sit up and remonstrate with them on their unkindness and want of proper feeling in thus distressing the very man who had been their friend and guide. He raised his poor bandaged head, supported himself with difficulty against the wall and began:

"On account of the pain occasioned by your losses I forgive you for insulting me when I need your pity—

opposing and turning me out the very first time that I have ever expected help at your hands. Hitherto your thanks and friendly behaviour have been a sufficient reward for the services and courtesies I showed you. Do not suggest to me—do not force me—to look back and review all I have done for you; the calculation would be very painful to me. Chance brought us together; circumstances and a secret liking kept me from leaving you. I took a part in all your work and pleasure, and the little knowledge I possessed was at your service. In laying the blame of our misfortunes so bitterly on me, you surely forget that the route we took was marked for us by strangers, but thoroughly examined and approved by each of you as well as by myself. If the journey had been successful every one of you would be praising himself now for having advised that road and preferred it to any other—would be looking back with pleasure at our deliberation and his own vote. But because things have turned out badly you make me alone responsible, and force an amount of blame on me which I would willingly take upon myself if my conscience did not completely clear me. If you have anything against me, bring it forward in a regular way, and I shall know how to defend myself; but if you have no well founded accusations to make, be silent, and do not torture me at a time when I am so much in need of quiet.”

Instead of answering him the girls began to cry again, and to go over their losses in detail. As to Melina, he had lost all self-command, for his losses were certainly greater than those of the rest—more indeed than we can imagine. He staggered about the room like a madman, knocked his head against the wall, swore and scolded in the most unseemly fashion, and, as just at

that moment the landlady came in with the news that his wife had brought a dead child into the world, he set no bounds to the fury of his language while the others howled, screamed, scolded and raged in concert with him.

Wilhelm, who was very sorry for their unfortunate position and yet disgusted at the meanness and vulgarity of their minds, felt all the strength of his soul awaken within him notwithstanding the weakness of his body. "I am almost tempted to despise you," he cried, "pitiable as your condition may be. No misfortune can possibly entitle us to load an innocent man with reproaches; if I had my share in the false step, I am suffering my share in the penalty. Here I lie wounded; and the greater part of your losses as a company falls on me. The dresses that have been stolen—the decorations that have been destroyed—all belonged to me, for you, Herr Melina, have never returned the money I lent you, and in this moment I release you entirely from that debt."

"It's all very well," said Melina, "to give away what no one will ever set eyes on again. Your money was in my wife's trunk, and it's your own fault that you've lost it. Ah! if that were but all!"—and he began to stamp and rage and scream again. Everyone remembered the splendid clothes from the Count's wardrobe and the buckles, watches, snuff-boxes and hats for which Melina had bargained so successfully with the valet. This reminded them again of their own equally lost, though far inferior treasures: they began once more to cast evil eyes at Philine's trunk, and gave Wilhelm to understand that he had most probably been very wise to take that fair lady into partnership, and so save his own possessions through her good luck.

"And do you really believe," he cried out at last, "that I should look on anything as my own while you were in want? Is this the first time that I have honestly shared with you in a time of need? Let the box be opened, and whatever in it is mine shall be at once placed at the disposal of all."

"The box is *mine*," said Philine, "and I shall not open it until I please. The honestest Jew in the world would not give much for those few things of yours. Do think of yourself a little for once—what your doctor's bill will come to, and all that may happen to you in a strange part of the country."

"Philine," said Wilhelm, "you will keep back nothing that belongs to me. What little there is will at least bring us out of our present difficulties. But a man possesses other things besides cash with which he can help his friends. Everything in me shall be devoted to these unfortunate people, and I feel sure they will be sorry for their present behaviour when they come to their senses. Yes," he went on, "I feel that you are in distress, and I will do all that lies in my power. Trust me once more and calm yourselves for the present; accept what I am going to promise you. I give you my word; who will take it in the name of the rest?"

As he said this, he stretched out his hand, exclaiming: "I promise not to give you up nor forsake you until every one has had his losses doubly and trebly made up to him, and until the circumstances you are now in (let the blame be whose it will) have been entirely forgotten and exchanged for happier ones."

He still held out his hand, but no one would grasp it. "Again I promise you," he said, sinking back on the pillow. They were all silent: put to shame, but not con-

soled; and Philine sat on her box cracking some nuts she had found in her pocket.

CHAPTER IX.

THE gamekeeper returned bringing some men with him to help in removing the wounded man. He had persuaded the clergyman of the place to take in the young married couple, as they were supposed to be; Philine's trunk was carried out and she walked behind it very simply and quietly. Mignon ran on in front. On their arrival at the parsonage the large spare bed, which had long been standing prepared for honourable guests, was allotted him. Not till then did they discover that his wounds had burst open and been bleeding violently. Fresh bandages had to be provided, fever came on; Philine nursed him most faithfully, and when overcome by sleep was relieved by the harper. Mignon, with the firmest determination to keep awake all night had fallen fast asleep in a corner.

In the morning Wilhelm felt a little better, and on talking to the gentleman's keeper heard that the family who had assisted him the day before had a short time before left their estates to avoid the disturbances brought on by the war, meaning to remain in some quieter neighbourhood until peace was proclaimed. He gave him the names of the elderly gentleman and his niece and of the first place at which they intended to stay, telling him also that the young lady had earnestly charged him to take great care of the forsaken ones.

Wilhelm's eager expressions of gratitude were interrupted by the entrance of the surgeon, who gave a minute description of the wounds, declaring they would

soon heal if the patient kept quiet and took care of himself.

After the keeper had ridden off, Philine told Wilhelm that he had left a purse containing twenty louis d'ors with her and had also given the clergyman a present for his kindness in lodging them and money enough to pay the surgeon. She said she was looked upon by every one as Wilhelm's wife, should introduce herself to him once for all in that capacity, and certainly not allow him to look out for another nurse.

"Philine," said Wilhelm, "I owe you already very many thanks for your kindness to me during this disastrous time, and I do not wish to increase my obligations. It makes me uneasy to have you near me, for I do not know how I can ever requite your trouble. Give me out those things of mine that you have in your box, join the rest of the company, find another lodging and accept my thanks and this gold watch as a small token of gratitude. Your presence distresses me more than you think."

When he had ended she laughed in his face. "You're a thorough fool," she said, "and you'll never be anything else. I know better what is good for you. I shall stay, I'm not going to budge from this place. As I've never yet reckoned on men's gratitude, of course I don't on yours, and if I'm fond of you, is that your business?"

So she staid, and soon ingratiated herself with the parson's family; she was always merry, had some little gift for every one and knew how to agree with every body's opinion, doing at the same time exactly what she liked herself. Wilhelm went on well. The surgeon was an ignorant, but not an unskilful man and left nature to have her own way; so that the patient was soon on the

road to recovery. He longed to be well that he might carry out some eagerly desired projects.

He was perpetually recalling the event that had made such an indelible impression on his mind. He saw the beautiful Amazon ride out of the thicket, come nearer to him, dismount, walk to and fro, give herself trouble on his behalf. He saw the garment in which she was enveloped fall from her shoulders, and her face and figure vanish in radiant and shining light. All his childish dreams connected themselves with this vision; it was as if he had seen the heroic Clorinda with his own eyes, and the old picture came back to his mind with the beautiful sympathising princess coming so modestly and gently to the bedside of the sick prince.

Sometimes he would say to himself: "May not pictures foreshadowing our future destinies hover around our unbiassed sight in youth just as well as in sleep? May not the germs of what is to happen to us in the future be already sown by the hand of fate? May we not taste in anticipation the fruit that later on in life we shall enjoy fully?"

He had leisure on his sick bed to go over this scene again and again in imagination. A thousand times he would recall the sound of that sweet voice, and how he envied Philine for having kissed that hand! Often the story seemed like a dream, and he would have held it for a fairy tale if the coat had not been left behind to witness that it had really taken place.

He took the greatest care of this garment, at the same time longing to be able to put it on; and did so directly he was able to leave his bed, in fear the whole day lest it should be stained or injured.

CHAPTER X.

LAERTES visited his friend. He had not been present at the noisy scene in the inn, having been confined to his bed in a small room upstairs. His own losses did not trouble him much; he comforted himself with his usual: "What does it matter?" and had some laughable stories to tell about the company; accusing Frau Melina of only mourning for the loss of her little daughter because it deprived her of the mediæval German pleasure of christening her Mechtilde. As to her husband it appeared, he said, now, that he had a great deal of money on him, and indeed had never really been in need of the sum he had coaxed Wilhelm to advance. His present intention was to start by the next mail, and to ask Wilhelm for a letter of introduction to his friend Serlo the manager, hoping that now his own undertaking had come to grief he might find employment in Serlo's company.

For some days Mignon had been very quiet, and at last, on being pressed for the reason, confessed that her right arm was out of joint. "For that," said Philine, "you've only your own imprudence to thank," and went on to tell how, when the child saw her friend in danger, she had drawn her cutlass and rushed bravely at the freebooters, one of whom at last had taken her by the arm and flung her on one side. She was scolded for not having complained sooner, but they could see she had been afraid of the surgeon, who had always taken her for a boy. They tried to repair the evil, and she was obliged to wear her arm in a sling, a fresh cause of trouble to the child, as it forced her to give up most of

the nursing and waiting on her friend to Philine, on which that amiable sinner proved more diligent and attentive than ever.

One morning on waking Wilhelm found himself in a very remarkable proximity to her. He had been restless in his sleep and had slipped quite to the back of the bed; Philine was lying stretched across the front, as if she had been sitting on the bed reading and had fallen asleep. A book had dropped from her hand and she had sunk back with the waves of her fair hair loose and lying over his breast. The disorder occasioned by sleep did more than any art or intention to heighten her charms. Her face looked like a smiling child's at rest. He looked at her for some time and seemed to blame himself for the pleasure he found in doing so. After he had gazed attentively for a few minutes she began to move. He closed his eyes softly, but could not help peeping through his eyelashes as she put herself to rights and then trotted off to enquire about their breakfast.

By degrees all the actors had applied to Wilhelm in a more or less insolent fashion for letters of introduction and travelling expenses, and in every case had received what they demanded, to Philine's great annoyance. It was all in vain that she told him the gamekeeper had left a considerable sum of money for them too, and that they were only making game of him. At last they came to a regular dispute about the matter, and Wilhelm declared once for all that she ought to join the rest of the company and try her fortune too with Serlo.

For a few moments her usual good temper forsook her, but she soon recovered herself and exclaimed: "If I only had my fair-haired boy back again I would not care a straw for any of you." She meant Friedrich, who had

vanished from the scene of attack and had never been seen since.

The next morning Mignon came to Wilhelm's bedside with the news that Philine had gone off in the night leaving all that belonged to him arranged in great order in the next room. He felt her absence; she had been a faithful nurse and cheerful companion and he was not used to be alone now. But Mignon soon filled up the gap.

So long as that frivolous girl had been busy and painstaking for him, the little one had drawn back by degrees and kept quietly to herself, but now that she had free scope she came forward again full of love and care, an eager little nurse and merry companion.

CHAPTER XI.

His recovery came on apace, and he hoped to be able to set out on his journey now in a few days. He was determined not to continue the loitering planless life he had begun; his path should be marked by decided steps taken towards a definite end. First, he meant to seek out the family who had given him such kind assistance, and express his thanks; then he would hasten off to his friend the manager and do his best for the unfortunate actors, at the same time visiting the various business connexions whose addresses had been given him and executing the commissions he had been entrusted with. He hoped that fortune would come to his help again and give him an opportunity of repairing his losses and filling his empty purse by some fortunate speculation.

His desire to see her who had saved him in his great need increased with every day, and he consulted

the clergyman in whose house he was staying, who was well informed in statistics and geography and had a good collection of books and maps, concerning his route. They looked for information as to the family, and also for the place said to have been chosen as their residence during the war, but the place existed neither in geography nor map, and none of the genealogical handbooks could furnish the name of the family.

This disturbed Wilhelm very much; he expressed his vexation, and then the old harper confessed that he had reasons for thinking the gamekeeper had (for what cause he could not say) suppressed the real name.

Having once taken up the fancy that the beautiful lady must be somewhere in the immediate neighbourhood, Wilhelm sent the harper on a voyage of discovery, hoping in that way to obtain some news of her; but here too he was disappointed. The old man did his best but could discover no trace of the family. There had been a good deal of active movement in that part of the country lately—bodies of troops had passed through unexpectedly, and nobody had paid special attention to that one travelling party; indeed, to escape being taken for a Jewish spy, the old messenger had been obliged to come swiftly home and appear before his master and friend, alas, without an olive-leaf. He gave a minute description of all the efforts he had made to execute his errand, and was anxious to free himself from all suspicion of negligence. He tried to comfort Wilhelm and to recall every word the gamekeeper had said, hazarding various conjectures, in the course of which a circumstance came to light which explained some mysterious words used by the vanished beauty.

The brigands it appeared had been lying in wait, not for the strolling players, but for the rich and noble

family in whose possession they rightly expected to find much money and many valuables, and of whose route they seem to have possessed exact information. It was not known whether the deed had been done by a free corps, by marauders or by robbers; enough that, happily for the wealthy and aristocratic caravan, the poorer plebeians had been first on the spot and so suffered the fate intended for the others. The lady's words which Wilhelm so well remembered must have referred to this, and happy as he felt in knowing that a prescient genius had chosen him to be the victim in whose stead a perfect mortal had been saved, the thought that all hope of seeing her, at least for the present, must be given up, brought him nigh unto despair.

His strange emotion on this matter was increased by a likeness which he fancied he had discovered between the beautiful Unknown and the Countess. They were as much alike as twin sisters of whom no one can say which is the elder or the younger.

The remembrance of that charming Countess was indescribably delightful to him. He was only too fond of recalling her sweet face. But now the figure of the noble girl on horseback would step in between, one vision would melt into the other, and he could hold neither fast.

Then too the likeness between their hand-writings was most singular. He had treasured up in his notebook a charming song in the Countess's own hand, and in the pocket of the coat he had found a little note asking most tenderly after the health of an uncle.

Wilhelm felt convinced that this must have been written by his beautiful deliverer during the journey, probably sent from one room into another of some inn where they had been staying, and put by the uncle into his pocket. He placed the two writings side by side; the

delicate, gracefully formed letters traced by the Countess had always pleased him, and he now discovered an indescribably flowing harmony in the bolder, though similar, strokes formed by the hand of the Unknown. The note contained nothing, but the writing seemed to have the same elevating effect on him as its writer's presence.

He fell into a dreamy longing, and the words, sung just at that moment in a kind of irregular duet by Mignon and the harper, exactly suited his state of mind:

“ Who knows a longing love
 Can know my pain.
 Alone below, above,
 All joy is vain.
 I gaze towards Heav'n all day,
 And long to fly that way,
 Where he who loves and knows me is,
 Far, far away.
 With burning heart and brain,
 Giddy and sick, I pine;
 And he who knows this longing pain
 Knows grief like mine.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE gentle allurements of his beloved tutelary genius instead of suggesting any decided path to our friend only nourished and increased the restlessness he had been feeling. A secret fire crept into his veins, definite and indefinite objects passed changefully before his soul and excited a longing which had no limits. Sometimes it was a horse he wished for, at others wings, and as it seemed impossible to stay where he was, he began to try and find out whither he was longing to go.

The thread of his fate had become so strangely tangled; he would have liked to see the strange knots either untied or cut. Often when he heard the sound

of carriages or horses' feet he would run to the window, hoping to see some one who—though perhaps only by chance—would bring him news, certainty, and joy. He amused himself by building a little castle in the air, in which his friend Werner was to come by chance into the neighbourhood and surprise him with the news that Mariane's appearance might be hoped for. The mere sound of a post-horn agitated him. Melina ought to send news of himself, but above all the gamekeeper ought to come back and bring an invitation from her whom he adored.

Alas, none of all these fancies came to pass; he was forced to remain his own companion, and in looking back at the past one circumstance grew ever more hateful and unbearable to him the more light he threw on it. This was his unsuccessful generalship, of which he could not think without annoyance. For though on that evening in the inn he had in a manner exculpated himself before the company, he could not deny that he had really been in fault, and indeed in desponding moments accused himself of having caused all their misfortunes.

Self-love exaggerates the importance of our virtues as well as our faults. He had awakened their confidence, influenced their decisions and then led the way, guided himself by daring and inexperience; danger had come unexpectedly, and they were no match for it. Reproaches silent and uttered had pursued him and he had promised the misled company not to forsake them until their losses should have been made up with interest. What was this but fresh rashness?—a presuming to take upon his own shoulders a burden which really belonged to the entire body? At times he upbraided himself for having allowed the excitement and pressure of that moment to force such a promise from

him; at others he regarded that good-natured offer of his hand which none of the party had vouchsafed to accept, as a mere formality compared with the vow which his heart had registered at the same moment. He began to think of methods by which he could be useful to them, and found plenty of cogent reasons for not putting off his journey to Serlo. He packed up his things, gave no heed to the clergyman's and surgeon's advice, and, without waiting till he was completely recovered, hurried off with his singular companions, Mignon and the old harper, eager to fly from that inactivity in which his destiny had once more detained him too long.

CHAPTER XIII.

SERLO received him with open arms; "What, is it really you? Let me see whether I should know you again. Why you're very little altered, if at all. Well, how is your love for the noblest of all the arts? As strong and lively as ever? I am so glad to see you here that I can almost forget the suspicion awakened by your last letters."

Wilhelm did not understand this and said so.

"Well," said Serlo, "you did not treat me like an old friend, but as if I were some grand lord to whom you could recommend useless people with a good conscience. You must remember that our fate hangs on public opinion, and I am afraid your Herr Melina and his followers have but a poor chance of being admitted among us."

Wilhelm tried to speak in their favour, but Serlo began to draw such an unmerciful description that our friend was only too glad to have the conversation inter-

rupted by the entrance of a lady whom Serlo at once introduced as his sister Aurelia. Her manner was most friendly and her conversation so pleasant that he never noticed an expression of sadness which made her clever face especially interesting.

It was the first time for long that Wilhelm had really felt in his element. He had generally great difficulty in finding amiable listeners to his discourses, whereas now he had the good fortune to talk with artists and critics who not only perfectly understood what he had to say but knew how to answer and teach him in their turn. How quickly they ran through the newest plays! with what perfect assurance they pronounced their criticism! how well they knew what value to set on public opinion, and how short a time it took to clear up mutual doubts or difficulties!

Of course Wilhelm's great predilection for Shakespeare soon turned the conversation to his plays. He spoke with eager hope of the glorious epoch which these magnificent pieces would bring in for Germany, and soon brought forward the beloved Hamlet with whom his thoughts had been of late so busy.

Serlo assured him that if it had been possible he should have given the piece long ago and would very gladly take Polonius as his own part, adding with a smile, "And if we only had a prince, Ophelias would be sure to turn up."

Wilhelm never noticed that Aurelia seemed annoyed by her brother's joke, but went on in his own prolix didactic way as to the manner in which he thought the part of Hamlet ought to be given. He detailed the inferences at which he had arrived, and with which we have already seen him so busy, and took great pains to convince his listeners that his hypothesis could be ac-

cepted, notwithstanding the many doubts raised by Serlo. "Well," said the latter at last, "suppose we agree to all this, what are you going to explain by it?"

"A great deal—every thing," was Wilhelm's answer. "Fancy the father of such a prince as I have described dying suddenly. Ambition and the lust of power are not the son's ruling passions. He had been content to be the son of a king, but now he is forced to study the distance which divides a king from his subjects. The crown was not hereditary, but had his father lived longer this only son's claims to it would have been more firmly grounded and his hopes ensured. Instead of this he finds himself, notwithstanding specious promises, excluded from it by his uncle, possibly for ever; feels poor both in possessions and favour, and a stranger in a place he had looked on from his childhood as his own property. This gives his mind its first sad tone. He feels now that he is no more—nay, rather less—than any nobleman at his court; yields himself to be the servant of every one, is not courteous and condescending, but needy and humbled.

"He looks back on his former condition as one does on a vanished dream. All his uncle's efforts to cheer him—to make him look at his position from a different point of view—are vain; the feeling of his own nothingness never forsakes him.

"But the second stroke cuts deeper and bows him down more even than the first, and this is his mother's marriage. True and tender son as he was he had hoped to honour the memory of his grand heroic father in company with the noble mother who was still left to him, but he loses her too, and would rather death had robbed him of her than lose her thus. A well-taught obedient child delights to look on his parents as beings in whom

he can completely trust. That image has vanished for Hamlet; no help can come from the dead, and no dependence could be placed on the living. She too is a woman, and therefore, like all her sex, her name is Frailty.

"And now he is quite bowed down, quite orphaned; nothing that the world has to give could ever make up for what he has lost. He is not naturally sad and thoughtful, but now melancholy and thought are his daily, hourly burden. And so we see him when he first appears on the scene. I don't think that I have put anything in which is not to be found in the piece, or exaggerated a single feature."

Serlo looked at his sister. "Was my description of our friend incorrect?" he said. "He has made a good start, and there is plenty still that he'll want to make us believe and talk us over to." Wilhelm protested solemnly that he wanted to convince them, not to talk them over, and begged they would have patience with him a moment longer.

"Now," he said, "picture to yourselves this young man, born a prince; try and realise his position; then watch him when he hears that his father's ghost has been seen, and stand by him in that awful night when the spirit he so venerates itself appears to him. He is stricken with a great awe and horror, speaks to the marvellous apparition, and when it beckons follows and listens. What does he hear? the terrible accusation against his uncle, the call to avenge the murder, and the urgent entreaty, 'Remember me.'

"And now when the ghost has vanished, what kind of man have we standing before us? A young hero thirsting for revenge? A prince born to the throne eager to attack the usurper of his rights? Not at all. We have

a lonely man amazed and melancholy, bitter at the thought of those smiling villains, swearing never to forget the dead, and concluding with the sigh so full of meaning:

'The time is out of joint ;—O cursed spite !
That ever I was born to set it right !'

"I fancy the key to all Hamlet's behaviour lies in these words, and it is clear to me that Shakespeare in this play meant to delineate: The burden of a great deed cast upon the soul of one who is not sufficient for the work. This is the leading idea throughout the whole piece. It is as if an oak had been planted in a rare and delicate vase fitted only for lovely flowers; its roots spread and the vase is shivered to pieces.

"A beautiful, pure, noble and thoroughly moral nature, but without the physical strength of nerve that goes to the making of a hero, is crushed beneath a burden that it can neither carry nor throw off. Every duty is sacred to him, but this one is beyond his strength. An impossibility is demanded of him; not an impossibility in the abstract, but yet one for him. How he winds, turns, frets, goes forward and then retraces his steps, is always being reminded or reminding himself of his object, and at last almost loses sight of it; but is never happy again."

CHAPTER XIV.

SEVERAL persons came in and interrupted the conversation. They were musical performers who generally assembled once a week at Serlo's house for a little concert. He was very fond of music and maintained that without some love for it no actor could arrive at a thorough comprehension of, or true feeling for his own

art. He used to say that action was always lighter and more graceful if accompanied by a melody, and therefore actors ought as it were to compose their part into a piece of music in their minds, so as not to slur it over monotonously, but treat it with the due variations of time and measure.

Aurelia seemed to take very little interest in what was passing: indeed she soon drew Wilhelm into another room, and there, going to the window and gazing up at the stars, said to him: "We have a great deal still to hear from you on the character of Hamlet, but I will not anticipate that, as I should like my brother to enjoy it with me; only tell me your ideas about Ophelia."

"There is not much to say about Ophelia," answered Wilhelm. "Her character is drawn with a few master-strokes. She is made up of sweet ripe sensations. Her liking for the prince, whose hand she has a right to claim, gushes so naturally from its source, and her kind heart gives way so entirely to its desires, that her father and brother are both afraid, and both warn her somewhat plainly and roughly. Propriety with her is only like the delicate veil of gauze drawn across her bosom; it rather betrays than hides even the gentlest movements beneath its folds. Her imagination is set on fire, an affectionate longing breathes through her quiet modesty, and if the convenient goddess Opportunity should shake the tree the fruit must fall."

"And then," said Aurelia, "when she finds herself forsaken, repulsed, and scorned, when everything in the soul of her mad lover has been so overturned that what was highest within him has become lowest and he offers her a bitter cup of suffering instead of the sweet draught of love—"

"Her heart breaks," said Wilhelm, "the whole frame

of her being becomes unhinged; then her father's death dashes in on her like a fearful storm, and the beautiful building falls in ruins."

Wilhelm had not noticed the expression with which Aurelia had pronounced her last words. He was thinking only of the connexion and completeness of this wonderful work of art, and had no idea of the different effect it was producing on her, and how these phantoms of the drama were stirring up a deep sorrow quite her own.

Aurelia had not moved from her first position; her head was still resting on her arms, and her eyes, though full of tears, were still turned towards the sky; but at last she could hide her pain no longer, seized both his hands, and astonished him by exclaiming: "Forgive a tormented, miserable heart! I feel so oppressed and fettered among these actors, and I dare not open my heart before my merciless brother; but your presence has loosened all my bonds. My friend," she went on, "we have only known one another a few moments and yet I can make you my confidant already." She could hardly finish her sentence, and sank on his shoulder. "Do not think the worse of me," she sobbed, "for opening my heart to you so quickly, and for this weakness. Be my friend and remain so; I deserve it." He spoke to her in the kindest way, but all in vain; her tears flowed on and choked her words.

At this moment Serlo came in, most inopportunately, and most unexpectedly; he was leading Philine by the hand. "Here is your friend," he said to her. "He will be glad to see you."

"How is this?" cried Wilhelm. "Am I to see you here?" She went up to him and welcomed him quietly and modestly, speaking of Serlo's great kindness in

having received her into his first-rate company without any deserts of her own, and only in the hope that she would take pains to improve. Her manner to Wilhelm was friendly, yet respectful and distant.

This disguise however only lasted while the brother and sister were present. As soon as Aurelia, to hide her sorrow, had left the room and Serlo had been called away, she ran to the doors to see that they were both really gone, and then began to hop and skip about the room as if she were crazed, seating herself on the floor and giggling and laughing till she was nearly choked. Then she jumped up again and began to flatter Wilhelm, rejoicing immoderately that she had been wise enough to go on before him, spy out the land, and make herself a little nest there.

"There are strange goings on here," she said. "It just suits me. Aurelia has had an unfortunate love-affair with some nobleman who must have been a splendid fellow; I should like to see him myself some day. There's a little boy running about the house as beautiful as the sun. His papa must be a charming man. Generally I can't bear children, but this boy delights me. I have been calculating; I can see it all. The death of her husband, the new acquaintance, and this child's age—it all matches famously.

"But alas, the lover has taken himself off, and she has not seen him for a year. She's beside herself about it; quite inconsolable, poor fool! Her brother flirts with a ballet-dancer in his troupe, is engaged to a little actress, pays attentions to ever so many married women in the town, and now I'm on his list too; so he's as much a fool as she. The rest you shall hear about to-morrow. And now just one little word about Philine, whom you happen to know already. That most arrant fool of all

is in love with you." She swore that this was true, and protested it was a capital joke. She begged Wilhelm to fall in love with Aurelia, and then the chase would begin in real earnest. "She will run after her faithless lover, you after her, I after you, and her brother after me, and if that doesn't give us half a year's fun I can only say I'm ready to die at the first episode that happens in this fourfold romance." She begged him not to spoil her arrangements, but to show her as much respect as he found her conduct in public deserved.

CHAPTER XV.

THE next morning Wilhelm called on Madame Melina. She was not at home. He enquired for the rest of the company and heard that Philine had invited them all to lunch. He followed quickly, out of curiosity, and found them all there comforted and even cheerful. The clever girl had got them together, was treating them to chocolate and giving them to understand that their prospects were not entirely gone, and that she hoped by her influence with the manager to convince him of the great advantage it would be to admit such clever people into his company. They listened most attentively, swallowing one cup of chocolate after another, thought that after all there was not so much harm in Philine, and determined to speak well of her in future.

"Do you really believe then," said Wilhelm when they were alone together, "that Serlo will make up his mind to keep them?"

"Not for a moment," was her answer, "and what's more I don't care a straw about it. Laertes is the only

one I should like to keep. We'll manage to get rid of the rest by degrees."

She then gave her friend to understand that she was persuaded he would not keep his talent any longer buried, but would go on the stage at last under such a manager as Serlo. She could not say enough of the order, taste, and intelligence which prevailed there, and spoke to him of his own talents in such a winning, flattering way that though both his understanding and reason turned away from her proposal his heart and imagination were attracted by it. He concealed this leaning both from himself and Philine, but passed a restless day and could not make up his mind to go and see if there were any letters lying for him with his business correspondent. For though he could pretty well guess the uneasiness his family must have felt during his long silence, he was rather afraid of having to read a detailed account of it, especially as he was promising himself a great and unmixed pleasure that evening in hearing the performance of a new piece.

Serlo had refused to let him be present at the rehearsal. "You must learn to know us on our best side," he said, "before we can let you look into our cards."

And indeed the representation that evening did give him the greatest satisfaction. He had never seen a theatre in such perfection. The actors were all without question highly gifted, had a clear exalted notion of their art, and, though not all equal, made up each other's mutual deficiencies, animated each other to further effort, and were exact and precise in their acting. It was easy to see that Serlo was the soul of the whole; he showed to great advantage among the rest. The moment he appeared on the stage—the first sentence he uttered—you could not help admiring his bright cheerful humour,

the lively manner which he so well understood how to keep in check, his unswerving sense of what was fitting and his great powers of imitation. His own inward ease and comfort seemed to spread over his audience, and the clever way in which he expressed, with the greatest facility, the most delicate shades of the parts he undertook gave all the more pleasure because he knew how to conceal the art he had made his own only by persevering practice.

His sister Aurelia was in no way inferior, and when she touched and softened those very hearts which he so well knew how to cheer and amuse, the applause was even louder than that which was accorded to him.

After a few days, passed very agreeably, Aurelia sent for Wilhelm. He went at once and found her lying on the sofa. She seemed to be suffering from headache, and her manner showed signs of feverish agitation. On seeing Wilhelm her eyes brightened.

"Forgive me," she said as he came in; "the confidence with which you have inspired me has made me weak. Hitherto my grief has been the companion of my solitude, indeed it has strengthened and comforted me; but now you—though how I cannot say—have loosened the bands that kept me silent, and so, against your own will, must take a share in the war I am waging with myself."

Wilhelm answered her in kind and courteous words, assuring her that her image and the recollection of her sorrow had been always hovering in his mind, begging her to confide in him and promising to devote himself to her service as a true friend.

While he was speaking his eyes fell on the boy who was sitting on the floor at her feet amusing himself with all kinds of playthings. As Philine had said, he might

be about three years old, and now for the first time Wilhelm understood what the frivolous girl, who so seldom made use of any elevated expressions, had meant by likening the child to the sun. Round his full face and bright open eyes curled the most beautiful golden hair, his forehead was dazzlingly white, and underneath it were dark finely pencilled and delicately curved eyebrows; his cheeks glowed with healthy colour. "Sit down by me," said Aurelia; "you are admiring that happy child. Yes, it's quite true that I was delighted to take him to my arms and that I have kept him carefully, but he is a test of the depth of my sorrow, because it so seldom allows me to feel the worth of such a precious gift.

"Let me," she continued, "talk to you about myself and my fate. I should not like you to misunderstand me. I sent for you because I thought I should have a few calm moments, but now you are come and I have lost the thread.

"'One more forsaken being in the world!' you will say. You are a man—you are thinking: 'How foolishly she behaves under a necessary evil—an evil which awaits every woman as surely as death, when a man is faithless. Poor foolish creature!' Oh, my friend, if my fate had been a common one I would gladly bear the common lot, but it is quite the reverse. If I could only show it to you in a mirror, or get some one else to tell you the story! If I had been led away, surprised, and then forsaken, there would still be some comfort left in my despair; but my fate is much worse than that. I have been my own dupe, have deceived myself knowingly, and that is what I shall never forgive myself."

"With such noble feelings as yours," said Wilhelm, "you can never be quite unhappy."

"And to what do you think I owe those feelings?"

asked Aurelia. "To the worst possible education by which a girl has ever been ruined and the worst examples by which her mind and inclinations could possibly be misled.

"My mother died early, and the beautiful opening years of my girlish life were spent with an aunt whose rule of life was to despise all the laws of decency. She yielded blindly to every inclination, and it mattered not to her whether the object of it were her master or her slave, so only that she could live in wild, dissolute pleasure and forget herself.

"You can imagine what ideas we children gained of your sex, with our clear, innocent way of looking at things. How dull, pushing, bold and awkward were the men she succeeded in attracting! How satiated, arrogant, empty and insipid when she ceased to please! I have seen that woman live in this debased condition for years, at the beck and call of the worst creatures. What treatment she was forced to bear at their hands! How she braved it all and even managed to wear these infamous fetters in a style of her own!

"This was the way, my friend, in which I learned to know your sex, and I hated them more intensely than ever when I found, or fancied I found, that in their relations with women even the better sort of men seemed to renounce the little good feeling of which nature might have rendered them capable.

"I learnt some sad things too about my own sex at that time, and indeed as a girl of sixteen I was wiser than now; for now I hardly understand myself. Why are we so wise when we are young—so wise, only to become more and more foolish as the years go on?"

The boy began to make a noise, Aurelia grew impatient and rang the bell. An old woman with her face

bound up came in to fetch him away. "Have you the toothache still?" said Aurelia.

"Almost beyond endurance," said the old woman in a gloomy voice. She took up the child, who seemed pleased to go, and left the room.

The moment he was gone Aurelia began to weep bitterly. "I can do nothing but moan and lament," she said, "and I am ashamed of lying here before you like a miserable worm. My self-control is gone, I cannot tell you any more of my history." She faltered and then was silent. Wilhelm, who did not wish to say anything general and common-place and could think of nothing specially suitable, pressed her hand and sat silently gazing at her. At last in his embarrassment he took up a book from the table before him. It proved to be Shakespeare's works and was lying open at Hamlet.

Serlo, coming in at the moment, asked after his sister and then looked into the book in Wilhelm's hand. "What Hamlet 'again!" he exclaimed. "Well that's just what I wanted. A good many doubts have arisen in my mind which seem very much to diminish the canonical authority you would like to claim for this play. Why the English themselves acknowledge that its principal interest ends with the third act and that the two last only just hold the others miserably together; and it's certainly true enough that towards the end the piece comes to a most tiresome stand-still."

"It is quite possible," said Wilhelm, "that single members of a nation which can produce so many master-pieces may be misled by prejudice and narrowness of judgment; but that need not hinder us from using our own eyes and being just. I am not the least inclined to find fault with the plan of this play; on the contrary, I much question whether a grander one has ever been

invented; indeed invented is not the word; it is no invention, it *is* so."

"How will you make that out?" said Serlo.

"I do not wish to make anything out," answered Wilhelm. "I only wish to put before you my own thoughts about it."

Aurelia raised her head from the cushion, rested it on her hand, and looked at Wilhelm; he, in perfect certainty that his was the right view, began: "It is very pleasant to us, very flattering to our vanity, to see a hero who can act independently of others; who hates and loves according to the dictates of his own heart, undertakes and accomplishes, sweeps aside hindrances and attains some grand end. Historians and poets would like to persuade us that such may and can be the proud lot of man; but here we are taught differently. The play is full of plan; its hero has none. There is no unbending, stubbornly-carried-out idea of vengeance on which some villain is punished. No, a monstrous crime is committed; it rolls on, dragging the innocent with it in its course; the criminal seems as if he wished to avoid the abyss destined for him, and falls into it just at the point where he thinks to go on his way in peace. It is with bad deeds as with good. The former bring down evil on the heads of the innocent just as, through the latter, blessings are brought to many who have done nothing to deserve them, and meanwhile the originators of both often remain unpunished and unrewarded. How wonderful that is in the play we are speaking of! Purgatory sends forth a spirit to demand vengeance: in vain! Circumstances combine to urge and bring it about: equally in vain! Neither earthly nor unearthly means can effect what it has been reserved for fate alone to do. The hour of judgment comes. The wicked and the good fall to-

gether: one generation is cut off, and another springs up in its stead."

There was a pause in which they sat looking at each other. Serlo broke it by saying: "Your praise of the poet is no great compliment to Providence: and your way of honouring Shakespeare reminds me of the fashion in which some people honour Providence: you give him an aim and plan which never came into his own head."

CHAPTER XVI.

"Now let me ask a question," said Aurelia. "I have been looking at Ophelia's part again. I am quite satisfied with it, and think under certain circumstances I could trust myself to play it. But tell me, ought not the poet to have given this poor mad girl a different kind of songs? Could not we choose some fragments from melancholy ballads for her? It's surely out of place to put ambiguous expressions and indelicate absurdities into the mouth of that noble girl."

friend
"My dear friend," said Wilhelm, "there too I cannot yield one iota. In these eccentricities and in this apparent impropriety there lies a great meaning. We can see from the very beginning of the piece on what the good, kind child's heart is set. She passes her life quietly enough, but she can hardly conceal her longings and wishes. Such tones ring secretly in her heart, and often, like an imprudent nurse, she may have tried to lull her wishes to sleep with songs which only served to keep them awake. At last, when self-control is gone and every thought is at her tongue's end, that tongue betrays her, and in the innocence of insanity she amuses herself even

in the royal presence with the echoes of her old wanton favourite songs: 'To-morrow is St. Valentine's Day'; and 'By Gis and by Saint Charity.'"

Wilhelm had not finished speaking when a most extraordinary and to him totally inexplicable scene began before his eyes.

Serlo had been walking up and down the room, apparently without any intention. Suddenly he went up to Aurelia's dressing-table, seized something which was lying on it and rushed to the door with his prize. The instant Aurelia saw what he had done she started up, threw herself between him and the door, attacked him with the most passionate violence, and was clever enough at last to seize one end of the stolen article. They wrestled obstinately, turning and twisting one another round in their endeavours; Serlo laughed, his sister grew angry; and on Wilhelm's going up quickly to separate and calm them he suddenly beheld Aurelia spring on one side with a naked dagger in her hand, while Serlo in vexation dashed the sheath which had been left in his on the floor. Wilhelm drew back in a silent astonishment which could find no words and seemed to ask how such an extraordinary struggle for such a singular piece of household goods could possibly have arisen between them.

"You shall judge between us," said Serlo. "What has she to do with that sharp steel? Just look at it. That dagger is not fit for any actress to use; it's as pointed as a needle and as sharp as a razor. Why in one of her violent moods she'll have an accident with it and kill herself. What meaning can there be in such a farce? I hate such eccentricities from the bottom of my heart. To think in earnest of such things is madness,

and to keep such a dangerous weapon as a toy ridiculous and out of taste."

"I have it back!" cried Aurelia, brandishing the naked dagger above her head. "In future I'll take better care of you, my faithful friend. Pardon me," she said, kissing the steel, "for my past neglect."

Serlo seemed getting really angry. "You may think what you like, brother," she said. "How can you be sure that I have not received a precious talisman under this form, from which I can obtain help and counsel in the time of trouble? Must a thing be hurtful because it looks dangerous?"

"Such senseless phrases are enough to drive one mad," said Serlo, and left the room in suppressed fury. Aurelia put the dagger carefully into its sheath and slipped it into her pocket, and on Wilhelm's asking some questions about their strange dispute, said, "Let us go on with the conversation that my unfortunate brother disturbed."

"I suppose I must accept your description of Ophelia's character," she continued: "I should not like to mistake the poet's meaning, but I must confess that I pity her more than I can sympathise with her. Now I hope you will allow me to make a remark which has often occurred to my mind during my short acquaintance with you. I admire very much the penetrating and correct eye with which you criticise poetry and more especially dramatic poetry; neither the profoundest depths of invention nor the most delicate features in the detail escape you. Without ever having seen the realities, you recognise the truth in the picture. A kind of fore-perception of what is in the whole world seems to lie within you and to be aroused and unfolded by the harmonious touch of poetry. For really," she went on, "from without

you receive nothing; I have seldom met any one who knew so little about, or so thoroughly misconceived the people he lived with as you do. I hope you will not mind my saying that to hear you expound your beloved Shakespeare any one might imagine you had just stepped down from a council of the gods, and had been listening to their plans for forming and educating mortals; while when you are with your fellow-men I seem to see in you another Adam, born full-grown, surveying lions and monkeys, sheep and elephants with wondering admiration and edifying good-nature, and addressing them in simple-hearted cordiality as his equals because they are alive and moving in the same world as himself."

"The feeling that I am still such a mere schoolboy," said Wilhelm, "is often oppressive to me, and I shall be most thankful to you, my valued friend, if you will help me to clear up my ideas about the world. Almost from childhood it has been my habit to turn the eyes of my mind within instead of without, and therefore it is very natural that I should have learnt to know *man* up to a certain point without in the least understanding *men*."

"I certainly," said Aurelia, "had my suspicions at first that you were making game of us when you wrote in praise of those people you sent my brother, and I compared their powers and deserts with your letters."

True as these remarks of Aurelia's might be, and willing as her friend was to admit this deficiency in himself, he could not help feeling somewhat galled and offended by them and remained silent, partly to hide his sensitiveness and partly to consider whether the reproach was just.

"This should not disturb you," said Aurelia. "The light of understanding lies always within our reach, but no one can give us true depth of feeling. If you are to

be an artist you cannot remain in this darkness and innocence too long; it is the beautiful sheath that protects the young bud. Misfortune enough when we are forced out too early! Yes, yes, it is often a good thing not to know the people we have to work for.

"I was once in that happy condition. I used to go on the stage with the highest idea of myself and of my nation. In my imagination the Germans were or could become everything. I felt I was speaking to this great nation; nothing but a little scaffolding of boards raised me above them; only the smoke and brightness of a row of lamps separated me from them and hindered me from distinguishing clearly what lay before me. How I enjoyed the acclamations that resounded from the multitude! how gratefully I accepted the presents given me unanimously by so many hands! For a long time I cradled myself in these ideas; I acted on the multitude and they reacted on me, I stood on the best of terms with the public, fancied there was perfect harmony between us, and that those I saw before me were the best and noblest of my nation.

"Unfortunately however it was not the actress only and her skill in her art which interested these lovers of the stage; they took a fancy to the young and lively girl, and gave me clearly to understand that it was my duty to share with them personally the feelings I had excited. This was not at all to my taste. I did wish to raise their minds, but to that thing within them which they called their hearts I laid not the slightest claim; they all—of every rank, age, and character—were a burden to me, and nothing annoyed me more than that, like any other respectable girl, I could not lock myself into my room and so avoid a great deal of trouble.

"Generally speaking, these men in their behaviour

reminded me of what I had seen at my aunt's, and I should have felt the same disgust if their peculiarities and absurdities had not tickled my fancy. As I was forced to meet them everywhere—at the theatre, at places of public amusement and at home—I resolved to amuse myself by spying out all their follies, a plan in which my brother helped me famously. Now when you think that from the frisky shopman and the conceited tradesman's son up to the clever, calculating man of the world, the bold soldier and the eager, impetuous prince, they all passed in review before me, each in his own way thinking to begin his little romance, you will forgive my having fancied that I must really be acquainted with the whole nation.

“I saw them all as they lived and moved, the fantastic, dandified university man, the shy student with his proud humility, the tottering, easily-pleased cathedral canon, the primly polite man of business, the plain-spoken country gentleman, the courtier with his polished platitudes, the young pastor beginning to go wrong, the cool and quiet—as well as the active and speculating—merchant; and I can take Heaven to witness that there was scarcely one among them all who had power to excite in me the faintest interest; on the contrary it was utterly loathsome to me to receive with fatigue and annoyance from these fools separately the very same applause which had been so pleasant and I had so gladly appropriated when it came from them collectively.

“If I ever hoped to hear a rational compliment on my acting or a word in praise of some author I esteemed, they were sure to utter a succession of the most ridiculous remarks and mention some stupid, vulgar piece in which they would like to see me act. Sometimes in society I would listen in hopes of hearing that some

noble sentiment, clever hit, or witty sentence in a play might still be echoing in their minds and come to light again at the right time, but seldom did I come on any trace of such a thing. Some trifling error made by an actor, a mispronunciation or provincialism uttered by accident—these were the points they clung to and could not get over. At last I grew quite at a loss what course to take; they thought themselves too clever to be amused, and fancied they were amusing me wonderfully by hanging about me. I began heartily to despise them every one; it seemed as if the entire nation had determined to lower itself in my eyes through these representatives. They appeared so awkward, ill-bred and ignorant, so devoid of everything pleasing and so totally destitute of good taste, that I often exclaimed, 'No German can even buckle his shoes until he has learnt how to do it from some foreign nation!'

"You see how infatuated, misanthropic, and unjust I was at that time, and the longer it lasted the worse I became. I really could have committed suicide; instead of which however I went to the other extreme and married, or rather allowed myself to be married. My brother had undertaken the management of the theatre and was in great want of a partner. His choice fell on a young man whom I did not actually dislike, who was wanting in everything that my brother possessed—genius, life, intellect, quickness and vigour, but on the other hand had just those qualities in which Serlo was deficient—love of order, industry, and a remarkable talent for economy and the management of money.

"He became my husband, I scarcely know how, and we lived together I scarcely know why. Suffice it to say that our affairs flourished. My brother's activity and energy brought in plenty of money, and my husband's

management made our income cover our expenses. I left off thinking about the world and the nation; with the world I had nothing in common and the nation as an idea had vanished for me. I acted for my daily bread; and only opened my mouth because I dared not be silent—because in fact I had come upon the stage to speak.

“In reality—for I must not make matters out worse than they really were—I had quite fallen into my brother's intentions. Money and applause were the two important points in his mind; for, between ourselves, Serlo likes to hear his own praises, and spends money very fast. I was not guided by my own feelings or convictions on the stage now, but by his directions, and was quite satisfied when I had succeeded in pleasing him. He studied the weak side of the public, money came in, he could live as he liked, and we had a pleasant time with him.

“Meanwhile I fell into a mechanical routine of life. The days passed joylessly and void of any special interest. I had no children and my married life soon came to an end. My husband fell ill; he grew weaker visibly day by day, and anxiety for him broke in upon my indifference to everything. It was then that I made an acquaintance which was the beginning of a new life for me—a new life and a faster one, for it must soon end now.”

She was silent a few moments and then said: “There, my talkative mood has come to an end all at once; I cannot trust myself to say another word. Let me rest a little; you shall not go away without knowing the whole cause of my unhappiness. Meanwhile let us call in Mignon and hear what she wants.”

While Aurelia was telling her tale the child had come into the room two or three times, but noticing that they

lowered their voices when she was there she had slipped away and was seated in the hall waiting quietly. When told to come in again she brought a book with her, evidently, to judge by its form and binding, a small atlas. On their way hither she had, for the first time in her life, seen a map at the pastor's; it had astonished her greatly, she had asked many questions and learnt all she could about it from him. Her desire for information seemed much stimulated by this fresh knowledge. She begged Wilhelm urgently to buy her the atlas, saying she had left her large silver buckles with the bookseller in pledge for it, and would redeem them the next morning as it was too late to do so that night. Her petition was granted and she began to say over to him all she knew, and in her own peculiar way to ask the strangest questions. In this as in other cases it was to be seen that with all her efforts she could only take in new ideas slowly and laboriously. It was the same with writing, which she had given herself great trouble to learn. Her German was still very broken, and she seemed to be using her only organ for communicating with others and revealing her innermost thoughts when she touched the cithern and opened her mouth to sing.

Now that we are speaking of Mignon, we must mention what had of late often placed our friend in some difficulty. Whenever she left him or returned after an absence, when they wished each other good-morning or good-night, she would clasp him so closely in her arms and kiss him so fervently that he was often frightened at the violence with which her nature seemed bursting into life. Her convulsive, restless vivacity seemed to increase every day; she was quiet, but there was no rest in her nature. She could not bear to be without a bit of string to wind about her fingers, a handkerchief to

twist in her hands, or a piece of wood or paper to chew, and all her games seemed only lightning-conductors for some inward commotion. The one thing that made her really cheerful was the companionship of little Felix, whom she could amuse very prettily.

After this little rest Aurelia was at last ready to explain herself to her friend on the subject that lay so near her heart, and—for once growing impatient at Mignon's determined perseverance—gave her to understand that she ought to leave the room; hints however proved of no avail, and at last they were obliged expressly and much to her dislike to send her away.

"I must tell you the rest of my story now or never," said Aurelia. "If my tenderly loved but unjust friend lived only a few miles from here, I should say, 'Take your horse, ride over, and try in some way to make his acquaintance; when you come back you will certainly have forgiven me, and pity me from your very heart.' As it is however I can only describe his fascination and my love in my own poor words.

"I made his acquaintance at that critical time when I was beginning to fear for my husband's health. He had just come from America where, in company with some Frenchmen, he had been serving in the United States army with much distinction. His manner of addressing me was so quietly dignified and full of open cordiality, he spoke so sympathisingly and intelligibly—so like an old acquaintance—about myself, my position and my acting, that for the first time I felt the pleasure of seeing my own existence reflected in some one else. His opinions were just but not condemnatory, pointed but not unkind. He was never severe, and even in his ironical moods amiable and courteous. He seemed accustomed to admiration from women; this drew my

attention: he neither pushed nor flattered; this put me at ease.

“He associated with few people in the town and rode a great deal on horseback, visiting his numerous acquaintances in the country round and attending to business matters. On his return he would stop at our house; he showed the warmest interest in the increasing illness of my husband, procured him relief from a clever physician, and while taking an interest in all that concerned me allowed me to do the same with regard to his own life. He told me the story of his campaign, spoke of his unconquerable liking for a soldier's life, acquainted me with his family affairs and confided to me the occupation he was then engaged in. In short he kept nothing secret from me, unfolded his inmost thoughts and allowed me to gaze into the most secret corners of his soul. I learnt to know his powers and his strongest feelings. It was the first time that I had enjoyed cordial intellectual companionship, and I was attracted—fascinated—before I had time to reflect where I was.

“During this time I lost my husband—almost as I had taken him—and the whole burden of the theatrical business fell on my shoulders. My brother, unequalled on the stage, was useless in business matters; I had to care for all, and at the same time studied my parts more diligently than ever. I began once more to act as in old days, indeed with fresh force and new life. He was the cause and it was for his sake, yet I did not always succeed best when I knew he was in the theatre. Sometimes however he would listen, unknown to me, and you may imagine how delicious was the unexpected praise.

“I am certainly a strange creature. In every part I played I felt as if I were praising him and speaking in his honour. Whatever the words might be, that was the

inward tone of my heart. If I knew he was among the audience I did not trust myself to speak with all my power; it was as if I would not force my love and admiration on him to his face, but if he were absent I felt free and did my best calmly and with an indescribable satisfaction. Applause gave me pleasure once more, and when the public were pleased, I longed to call down to them: 'You owe it all to him.'

"My relation to the public, indeed to the whole nation, was altered as by a miracle. I could look on it once more in the most favourable light and was astonished at my former blindness.

"How unreasonable it was, I often said to myself, to abuse a nation for being a nation! Is it necessary or possible, that each individual should be interesting? The question is: Is there talent, power, capacity in sufficient amount among them to guide them to a common object when developed by favourable circumstances and led by first-rate men? It rejoiced me now to find so little striking originality among my countrymen; it rejoiced me that they were not too proud to accept guidance from without, and finally it rejoiced me that I had found such a worthy leader for them.

"In speaking to me of the Germans, Lothair—let me call him by that name of his which I so loved—had always recommended them to me on the score of their courage. When properly led, he said, there was not a braver nation on the face of the earth, and I was ashamed that this first and highest quality of a people should never have struck me. He was well read in history, and connected with most of the men of merit of his day. Though so young himself, he was already looking forward to the hopeful germs of good that were rising among the youth of his country and was watching the quiet

work of active energetic men in their different spheres. He shewed me what Germany was and what it might be, and I felt ashamed at having judged a whole nation by the mixed multitude that push into the green-room of a theatre. He set it before me as my duty, too, in my own sphere of work, to be true, to use my intellect and to endeavour to put life into others. After hearing this I felt inspired whenever I appeared on the stage; commonplace sentences turned to gold in my mouth, and if at that time I had had the assistance of a poet equal to the work I should have produced amazing effects.

“In this way the young widow lived for months. He could not do without me and I was most unhappy if he remained away long. He showed me letters from his relations and his delightful sister, and took an interest in the merest trifles that concerned me; a more perfect intimate union cannot be imagined. Love was never named between us. He went and came, came and went, —and now my friend it is high time that you should go too.”

CHAPTER XVII.

WILHELM could not put off visiting his business friends any longer, and knowing that he should find letters from his family there he felt a little uneasy. He was afraid of the reproaches that they would be sure to contain; was afraid too that at this large house of business they might have heard of his friends' anxiety about him. After having been the hero of so many romantic adventures he did not at all relish the poor sort of school-boy appearance which he should present, and

determined to hide his confusion by braving the matter out in a *nonchalant* style.

To his great astonishment, however, everything went off well and smoothly. In that large busy counting-house they had hardly time to look for his letters, and only just mentioned casually that they had expected him sooner. The contents of his father's and Werner's letters, too, were not half so bad as he had feared. The old man was looking forward to the copious journal which at parting he had so earnestly impressed upon his son to keep, and for which he had provided him with a ruled plan arranged under different heads; did not therefore seem much discomposed by his son's silence during the earlier part of his journey, and only complained that the first and only letter he had received, the one sent from the Count's castle, was rather a riddle to him. Werner joked in his own way, told some amusing town-gossip, and asked for news of the many friends and relations whose acquaintance Wilhelm would be sure to make in the large commercial city. Our friend was delighted at escaping so cheaply, and wrote some cheerful letters back without delay, promising his father a circumstantial journal of his travels, with all the desired geographical, statistical, and mercantile intelligence. He had in reality seen a great deal during his journey, and hoped to be able to put together a very respectable pamphlet, forgetting that it was almost a similar case to the one long ago, when, in order to perform a play which had not even been written, much less learnt by heart, he had lighted candles and assembled an audience. On thinking over the matter seriously he discovered to his distress that though able to tell of many a feeling and reflection—many an experience passed through by mind and heart—of outward objects he had nothing at all

to say: they had positively received no share of his attention.

In this difficulty the knowledge possessed by his friend Laertes stood him in good stead. Different as these two young men were, habit had bound them together, and Laertes, with all his faults and oddities, was really an interesting man. Endowed with a cheerful and happy sensitive faculty, he might have grown to be an old man without taking the trouble to reflect on his position. But misfortune and illness had robbed him of his untroubled youthful feelings and given him a glance into the transient, broken nature of man's existence. This accounted for the capricious, rhapsodical way he had of thinking about things, or rather of expressing the immediate impressions they made on him. He was not fond of being alone, and frequented all the different coffee-houses and dining-rooms; if by chance he ever did stay at home, travels were the favourite—indeed the only—books he cared to read. Having discovered a large lending library he could gratify this taste, and before long his good memory was haunted by half the habitable world.

For this reason, when Wilhelm revealed his perfect poverty in materials for the account he had so solemnly promised, Laertes was ready with encouragement and comfort. "We'll produce a work of art," he said, "the like of which has never been seen before.

"Is there a corner of Germany that has not been wandered, flown, crept, marched or travelled over in some fashion or other? and has not every German traveller the delightful advantage of always getting his expenses, large or small as the case may be, repaid to him by the public? You have only to tell me your route before you met us, the rest I know. I'll look out all the

necessary books of reference and sources of information for you; we must have plenty of areas whose square miles have never been calculated, and populations whose numbers have never been reckoned. The revenues of the different countries we can take out of almanacs and tables, well known to be the most trustworthy documents. On these we shall ground our political reasonings; and a few side-glances at the ruling powers must not be wanting. If we describe one or two governments as truly paternal, we shall be the more readily believed when we fling an aspersion at any of the others; and if we have not exactly visited the residences of celebrated men, we'll at least have met them in some hotel or other, and make them talk the greatest nonsense to us in strict confidence. But above all we must gracefully weave in some love affair with a simple artless girl, and I'm convinced the result will be a production which shall not only enchant your father and mother but which would be bought with pleasure by any bookseller."

They went at once to work and enjoyed it. The evenings Wilhelm spent in the theatre, and with Aurelia and Serlo, to his great satisfaction, and his ideas which had too long been turning in one narrow circle grew wider every day.

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was not without the greatest interest that he heard some fragments of Serlo's life—fragments only, because this strange man seldom took any one into his confidence or told any story in an unbroken connexion. It

might really be said of him that he was born and nursed on the stage. Before he could speak he had had to move the audience by his mere babyish presence, (for even in that day authors were acquainted with these natural and innocent expedients,) and his first lisping "Father" or "Mother" in some favourite piece brought him the greatest applause before he knew what the sound of clapping meant. As Cupid he had more than once descended trembling from above; he had crept out of an egg as Harlequin, and played the prettiest pranks as a little chimney-sweeper.

But, in the intervals between these brilliant evening performances the poor child had to pay bitterly enough for this applause. His father, convinced that children can only be made and kept attentive by blows, flogged him at regular intervals while he was learning his part; not because the boy was awkward but that he might be more certainly and continuously expert; just as in olden times, when a boundary-stone was put up, the children who were looking on received each a smart box on the ear, the result of which was that the oldest inhabitants of the place had a perfect recollection of the spot. As Serlo grew up he proved to be wonderfully gifted both in body and mind, and to possess great flexibility in action and gesture as well as in his mode of representing anything. His power of mimicry was almost incredible. When still quite a boy he could so perfectly imitate people who in age, appearance, and manner were totally unlike himself or each other that they seemed to be present. At the same time he was not at all deficient in the gift of making his way in the world, and it was therefore very natural that, as his father continued to find harsh treatment necessary to assist the growth of his son's

reasoning powers and dexterity, the boy should run away as soon as he became at all aware of his own capabilities.

And happy enough the frolicsome fellow felt, at large in the world and secure of a welcome everywhere for the sake of his merry tricks. His good fortune led him first to a monastery, where the holy father whose duty it had been to superintend the processions and delight the Christian community by religious masquerades, had just died; he therefore appeared as an angel of help. He at once undertook the part of the angel Gabriel in the Annunciation, and was by no means displeasing to the pretty girl who, in her character of the Virgin Mary, received his polite greeting very gracefully, with outward humility and inward pride. After this he took successively all the most important characters in their Mysteries, and felt himself no small personage when at last he was scoffed at, scourged, and nailed to the cross as Saviour of the world.

It seems that on this occasion some of the soldiers must have played their part a little too naturally, for which Serlo determined on inflicting an appropriate revenge. He chose as fitting opportunity the Day of Judgment, had them arrayed gorgeously as emperors and kings, and in the moment when, perfectly satisfied with the part allotted them, they were on the point of preceding every one into Heaven, he rushed out upon them in the shape of the Evil One, and, to the exquisite edification of all the spectators and beggars assembled, soundly belaboured them with a pitchfork and thrust them down into the pit from whence ascending flames portended a fearful reception.

He was sharp enough however to see that these

crowned heads would neither look favourably on his saucy attempt nor even respect the privileges of his office as accuser and beadle, so he went off quietly before the Millennium had begun, and was received with open arms in a neighbouring town by a society of people calling themselves the Children of Joy. It was made up of a set of clever, sensible, jovial fellows who were aware of the fact that if you divide the sum of human existence by reason there is always a remarkable fraction left over. This disturbing, and, when dispersed among the mass of humanity, dangerous fraction, they tried to get rid of at set times. One day in every week they made thorough fools of themselves, taking it by turns on those days to give a kind of allegorical representation, in which they lashed the follies observed in themselves or others during the rest of the week. This might be a rougher kind of education than the course of observation, warning, and punishment pursued with regard to themselves by moral and religious men, but at any rate it was surer and more entertaining. A favourite folly was not disowned, but then it was treated according to its deserts; whereas by the other method self-deception often helps folly to gain the upper hand, and while reason is dreaming that she has long turned folly out of the house, that very pet folly has secretly enslaved her. Each member of the society took his turn to wear the fool's mask, and was allowed on his own day to deck it out in character, either with his own or other people's attributes. During the Carnival they took the greatest liberties and rivalled the priests in their endeavours to amuse and attract the common people. Their solemn allegorical processions of the Virtues and Vices, Arts and Sciences, Quarters of the Globe and Seasons of the Year gave a bodily form

to many mere notions in the minds of the crowd, and gave them fresh ideas of distant objects, so that these sports were by no means useless, whereas the priests' mummeries only helped to rivet an insipid superstition.

Serlo here was once more in his element. He could not be said to possess any real invention, but a wonderful skill in turning given material to use, arranging and giving a plausible appearance to it. His bright ideas, power of mimicry and the cutting wit which, at least one day in every week, he was at liberty to use even against his benefactors, made him not simply valuable, but indispensable to the whole society.

And yet his restless disposition soon drove him out of this advantageous position into fresh regions of his native land, where he had to pass through fresh training. He came into those educated and yet prosaic parts of Germany where so little that is pictorial or figurative exists—where the good and beautiful are honoured in a truthful, certainly, but often in an unintellectual way. He could produce no effect by his masquerades, and found he must endeavour to work upon the hearts and minds of his audience. He never staid in any one company, whether large or small, long, but during the time he was with them he would notice and learn the characteristic peculiarities both of the players and their plays. He soon saw the dull monotony that then prevailed on the German stage, remarked the absurd sing-song cadence of the Alexandrines, the stilted empty dialogue and the dulness and vulgarity of the direct moralisers, at the same time noting whatever touched and pleased the audience.

His memory retained with ease, not only single parts of the plays then in vogue, but the entire pieces, with

the tone and manner of any actor who had performed them successfully. At one point of his wanderings, his money being all gone, he came by chance upon the idea of acting whole plays by himself at gentlemen's country-houses and in the villages, and in this way obtaining food and a night's lodging wherever he might be. His theatre was quickly put up—sometimes before a tavern—sometimes in a room or garden; he understood how to gain a hold on the imaginations of his listeners by a roguish gravity and an appearance of enthusiasm, at the same time deceiving their senses and turning an old wardrobe into a castle or a fan into a dagger before their eyes. The heat of youth made up for real depth of feeling, his violence was mistaken for strength and his flattery for tenderness. To those among his audience who already knew the theatre, he brought back recollections of all they had seen and heard; in the minds of the rest he raised an idea of something strange and wonderful which they would like to know more nearly. Whatever produced an effect in one place he never failed to repeat in another, but the mischievous fellow's greatest delight was to make fun of everybody at once, extempore.

His mind was so alert, free, and unfettered by extraneous affairs, that with this constant repetition of different parts and entire plays he improved very fast, and soon his acting and reciting were more consonant with the real sense than those of the models he had set before himself at first for imitation. In this way he became by degrees a natural actor, and yet was always feigning. He seemed carried away by his feelings while watching to see what effect he produced, and his greatest pride was to work up the feeling of his audience step by step. The mad wild kind of trade he

was driving in itself compelled him to a certain amount of moderation, and he was soon taught, partly by instinct and partly by necessity, what very few actors have an idea of, namely: to economise, both in the use of voice and gesture.

By these means he succeeded in taming even coarse and harsh natures and interesting them in his favour. As he was always contented with the food and shelter supplied him, thankful for every gift however small, and indeed would sometimes refuse payment—if according to his own ideas he had money enough—he was sent with letters of recommendation from one house to another, and thus spent a considerable time wandering among these country-seats, the source of many a pleasant hour to others, enjoying many a one himself, and meeting by the way with most charming and interesting adventures.

He could not be said really to love any one; for that he was too cold-hearted, and his clear-sightedness prevented him from respecting any one. He busied himself with their outward characteristics only and recorded them in his collection of singularities to be mimicked. But his self-love was deeply wounded if he failed in securing universal approbation, and he had so carefully studied the best means of obtaining this and so sharpened his sagacity on the point, that at last he became incapable of anything but flattery both in his performances and in his daily life. Thus disposition, talents, and way of life all worked together to make him a perfect actor almost without his own knowledge. Indeed, by what seems a singular, but was in reality a perfectly natural course of action and reaction, his recitation, declamation, and pantomime reached a very high degree of truth, freedom,

and openness, while in real life, and towards those with whom he associated he seemed to become more secret and artificial, nay, even hypocritical and timid.

We may perhaps speak of his history and adventures elsewhere; at present we will only remark that in later years, when he had made his way, earned a name, and a good—if not a secure—position, he adopted a habit of playing the sophist in a subtle fashion, at times ironically, at times derisively, so as to destroy all possibility of carrying on serious conversation with him. He indulged in this more especially with Wilhelm, whenever the latter, which was often the case, showed any wish to begin a general theoretical discussion. Still they liked to be together, as their different lines of thought were sure to produce a lively conversation. Wilhelm wanted to develop everything from the ideas he had already laid hold of, and to have art treated in a connexion. He wished to lay down rules, to decide what was good, beautiful, and worthy of approbation—in short he treated every subject on its gravest side. Serlo on the contrary took everything lightly, and though he never gave a direct answer to any question, he would often by a story or joke convey a most satisfactory explanation, and afford the company information and amusement at the same moment.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE hours that were passing so pleasantly for Wilhelm were miserably spent by Melina and the others. Sometimes they seemed in our friend's eyes like evil

spirits, and caused him most unhappy moments, not only by their presence but by surly looks and bitter speeches. Serlo had not even allowed them to act strangers' parts, much less held out any hope of an engagement, and yet by degrees he had contrived to learn what each one was capable of. It was his habit whenever he had a party of actors at his house to get up a reading, and often to take part in it himself. He chose pieces which were to be given at a later period, but which had not been performed for long and generally in selections only. After a first performance too he would have those parts repeated in which there was anything he wished to remind the actors of; this had the effect of sharpening their discernment, and making them feel more certain of hitting the right point. Minds of inferior but correct understanding can effect more for the satisfaction of others than confused and muddy geniuses, and on this principle Serlo succeeded in raising actors of very indifferent talent to an admirable degree of capability, by the clearness of discernment which he imperceptibly imparted to them. One thing which contributed not a little to this was his practice of having poetry read aloud, and thus keeping alive in their minds the charm produced by well-read rhythm, whereas other companies had already begun only to introduce such prose as could be read with ease by any one.

During occasions such as these he had made himself acquainted with the newly-arrived players, formed a judgment of what they already were, and what they might become, and then silently made up his mind to avail himself of their gifts in case of a revolution which was threatening in his own company. He let the matter rest for a time, declining all Wilhelm's intercessions with a shrug of the

shoulders until he saw his opportunity, and then surprised his young friend by quite unexpectedly proposing that he should come upon the stage himself, on which condition he would engage all the others.

"Then," answered Wilhelm, "they cannot be so useless as you have always described them, if you are prepared to engage the whole number at once. Their talents must remain the same, I should think, whether I am with them or not."

On this Serlo, under a promise of secrecy, revealed to him the position of his affairs. His principal actor, he said, who took the most important lovers' parts, had shown signs of an intention to ask for a larger salary at the renewal of his contract. To this he was not inclined to yield, more especially as the man no longer stood so high as formerly in the opinion of the public. But if he let him go the man's whole set would follow in his wake, by which the company would lose some good though also some but indifferent members. Serlo then went on to specify what he hoped on the other hand to secure in Wilhelm, Laertes, the old Blusterer, and even in Madame Melina. Indeed he prophesied most decided success even for the poor Pedant as Jew, minister, or villain of any kind.

Wilhelm was startled at hearing this proposition, and uneasy. He fetched a deep breath, and then, only because he felt he must say something, answered: "You speak pleasantly enough of the good you find and hope to find in us, but what of our weak points? They have certainly not escaped your penetration."

"We will soon turn them into strong ones," was Serlo's answer, "by industry, practice and thought. There's not one among you—for after all as yet you are but novices

and bunglers—who does not give some hope for the future: as far as I have been able to judge none of them are what you can call thorough sticks, and those are the only people we can really do nothing with, whatever their stiffness and awkwardness may arise from—conceit, stupidity, or spleen.”

Serlo then in a few words proposed the terms he could and was willing to offer, begged Wilhelm to give him a speedy answer and went away, leaving our friend in no small disturbance of mind.

The strange labour which he had begun with Laertes, of composing a fictitious journal of his travels, had drawn his attention to the affairs and daily life of the real world more than had ever been the case before. Now he understood his father's motive in impressing this work upon him so earnestly. He felt for the first time what a pleasant and useful position it might be, to act as medium between so many different kinds of trade and industry, and the varied needs of the world—to penetrate the most distant mountain ranges and forests of the continent, helping to spread life and activity everywhere. The bustling, commercial town in which they were now staying, and into every corner of which he was dragged by the restless Laertes, taught him vividly the meaning of a great central point from which all things flow out and to which they return, and it was the first time that the contemplation of this species of activity had given his mind pleasure. Such was Wilhelm's state of mind when Serlo arrived with his proposal, reviving all the old wishes, inclinations, confidence in his innate talent for this art, and consciousness of obligation towards the helpless company of actors.

“Here I am,” he said to himself, “once more at the

'cross-roads,' standing between the two women who appeared to me in my youth. The one does not look so miserable as she did then, nor the other so splendid. You feel a kind of inward call to follow the one as well as the other, and the outward inducements are strong enough on either side. It seems impossible to make up your mind; you would like some preponderant consideration from without to decide the matter for you, and yet, if you examine yourself thoroughly, you will see that your present fancy for business, profit, possession, has only been inspired by outward circumstances, while the wish to go on developing and training those tendencies towards the good and beautiful which, whether bodily or mental, may be lying dormant within you, was born and nourished in your inmost heart. And ought not I to revere my fate for bringing me to the object of my desires without any assistance of my own? Is not everything that I used to plan and contrive happening now accidentally without my co-operation? It is very strange! There seems nothing that a man can be more intimately acquainted with, than the hopes and wishes that he has been nursing for a long time in his heart, and yet when they meet him face to face—when they, as it were, force themselves upon him—he does not recognise them—he even goes out of their way. All that I scarcely dared even to dream of before the wretched night that parted me from Mariana, is now standing before me, offering itself for my acceptance. I meant then to flee hither, and I have been gently led to the very place. I meant to ask Serlo for employment, and now Serlo comes to me, offering better conditions than beginners have any right to expect. Could it have been my love for Mariana only that riveted me to the stage? or was it love of art

that bound me to her? That prospect and opening for going on the stage—was it only welcome because it enabled a disorderly, restless fellow to continue a life which was not permitted by the circumstances of the world in which he moved? or was it all different, purer, worthier? and if so, ought anything to be able to induce you to alter the opinions you held then? Have not you hitherto been following out your own plan, though unconsciously? and is not this last step still more justifiable when there are no secondary considerations in view, and when by doing it you will be fulfilling a solemn promise, and releasing yourself nobly from a heavy debt?"

All that had been stirring his heart and imagination passed through his mind at this moment in eager conflict. That he should be able to keep his little Mignon, and not be forced to turn away the harper were of no small weight in the scale, and yet it had not ceased to waver when, as usual, he went to visit his friend Aurelia.

CHAPTER XX.

HE found her on the sofa. She seemed quiet. "Do you think you shall be able to play to-morrow?" he said.

"Oh yes!" she answered eagerly. "You know nothing ever keeps me from that. If I only knew any way of getting rid of that applause from the pit! they mean so kindly, but it is killing me. The day before yesterday I thought my heart would break. I used to like it when I was contented with my own acting; when I had

studied a long time and was prepared, I used to rejoice at hearing the welcome sign that I had succeeded resounding from every corner of the house. But now it is not my own will that guides either what I say or how I say it. I am carried away—I get confused, and my acting makes much more impression than formerly. The applause grows louder and I think to myself: 'If you only knew what it is that is enchanting you so! Those obscure, passionate, uncertain sounds touch your feelings—they force admiration from you—but you do not know that they are cries of agony from the unhappy being towards whom you feel so kindly.'

"This morning I learnt my part and I have just been repeating it over and trying it. I feel tired and shattered, and to-morrow it will be the same thing over again; in the evening the play is to be given. In this way I drag on my existence; rising in the morning is a weariness, going to bed at night a trouble. Everything within me goes round in a perpetual circle. Then those tiresome consolations suggest themselves and I reject them—execrate them. I will not submit—not even to necessity. Why should what is killing me be a necessity? Could not things just as well be different? I have to pay for being a German; it is our character to be burdensome ourselves and find everything else a burden."

"O my friend," said Wilhelm interrupting her, "if you could only leave off adding sharpness to the dagger with which you so unceasingly stab yourself! Because he is gone, is everything gone? Your youth, appearance, health, talents—are they all nothing? Because you have lost one blessing without any fault of yours, are you obliged to throw all the rest after it? Can that be necessary?"

She was silent for a moment and then said in a tone of impatience: "I know very well that love is waste of time—mere waste of time. What could not I, what ought not I to have done? and it has all come to nothing. I am a poor creature in love—in love, and nothing else! Have compassion on me! God knows I am a miserable creature."

She was lost in thought for a few moments and then exclaimed passionately: "You men are accustomed to have every one fall into your arms. No, you cannot—no *man* can—feel the value of a woman who respects herself. By all the holy angels—by every idea of eternal bliss formed in a pure kind heart—there is nothing more heavenly than a woman ready to devote herself for the man she loves! While we deserve to be called women we are cold, proud, high, clear-sighted and clever, but all this we are ready to lay down at your feet directly we love, or hope to have our love returned. Oh, how I have thrown away my whole existence, consciously and willingly! But now I will give way to despair—deliberate despair. No single drop of blood in me shall go unpunished, no fibre untormented! Yes, you may smile—nay laugh if you will—at this actress's wasteful display of passion."

But our friend was far enough from any thought of laughter. He was far too much pained at the sight of Aurelia's fearful—half-natural, half-forced—state of mind. He felt with her the torment of this unhappy, overstrained condition; his brain became disturbed, his blood ran feverishly in his veins.

She had risen, and was pacing up and down the room. "I tell myself," she exclaimed, "all the reasons why I ought not to love him. I know too that he is unworthy of my love. Then I turn my mind away from

the subject, think of something else, occupy myself in the best way I can. Sometimes I study a part in some play though I have not to act it, or I go over the old ones again, and though I know them already by heart, study them more diligently in detail—practise them over and over again—but oh, my friend, my confidant, what fearful work it is to try and get away from one's self! My senses seem going, my brain is so overstrained, and then to save myself from madness I give way once more to the feeling that I love him. Yes, I love him," she cried, shedding floods of tears, "I love him, and in that love I will die!"

He took her hand and entreated her most earnestly not to distress and wear herself out in this way. "How strange it is," he said, "that not only so many impossible, but so many possible things are denied to mortals! You, for instance, were not destined to meet with a faithful heart that would have made you perfectly happy; while I was destined to hang my whole well-being on one unhappy girl whom I dragged down to the earth like a reed—perhaps even snapped in two, by the weight of my faithful love."

He had told Aurelia the history of his love for Mariana and could therefore refer to it now. She looked fixedly into his eyes, and asked: "Can you say that you have never deceived a woman? never tried to gain her favour by thoughtless gallantry, criminal protestations, and oaths that appealed to her heart?"

"That I can," said Wilhelm, "and without boasting; for my life was very simple, and I was seldom exposed to the temptation of tempting others. And now what a warning for me lies in your own sad condition, my beautiful, noble friend! Take a vow now from me—a vow

that thoroughly expresses my feelings—that has taken form and speech from the emotions which you have excited in me, and is hallowed by the moment in which I make it: I will resist every passing inclination, and keep every earnest one secret in my own bosom. No woman shall even hear a confession of love from me unless I can devote my whole life to her!”

There was a wild indifference in her eyes as she gazed at him, and when he held out his hand she drew back a few steps. “It does not matter,” she exclaimed, “so many women’s tears more or less will not swell the sea. And yet it is something to save one woman and find one honest man among thousands. Yes, that may be accepted. But do you know what you are promising?”

“Yes, I know,” said Wilhelm and held out his hand.

“I accept it,” she said, and moved her right hand as if she were going to take his, but in an instant it was in her pocket; she had pulled out the dagger with the speed of lightning and drawn both point and edge sharply across his hand. He caught it back hastily, but the blood was flowing.

“You men must be marked sharply if you are to remember,” she cried with wild mirth which soon changed into eager activity. She bound up his hand with her handkerchief to stop the bleeding. “Pardon a woman who is half out of her mind,” she said, “and don’t repent having shed these drops of blood. I am reconciled now—I am myself again. I will beg to be forgiven on my knees; let me have the consolation of healing your wound.”

She ran to her wardrobe for linen and other necessaries, stopped the bleeding, and carefully examined

the wound. The cut ran across the palm of the hand, beginning immediately under the thumb, dividing the line of life, and ending near the little finger. She bound it up without speaking, absorbed in her own thoughts, and with a look of deep meaning. Once or twice he said: "Dear Aurelia, how could you hurt your friend?"

"Hush!" she answered, laying her finger on her lips, "Hush!"

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